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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger study of systemic educational reform in rural Alaska, this case study examines reform efforts underway in New Stuyahok, a community of 440 people in southwestern Alaska. The population is almost entirely Yup'ik Eskimo. The K-12 school enrolls about 150 students. In 1992, Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) established district and village leadership teams that began the process of bridging the gap between school and community. Through a collaborative approach to planning, the school and community established two major goals: postsecondary success and increased bilingualism. A 1995 action plan sought to increase community involvement in the AOTE process, the use of community instructors, village pride in Yup'ik culture and language, and integration of community culture in the school. The bilingual education program was also targeted for improvement. From 1993 to the present, student achievement has shown a positive trend, with improvements in postsecondary attendance, standardized test scores, and writing assessments. However, increased student proficiency in and use of Yup'ik remains an unmet goal. A major problem is high teacher turnover, which works against building a stable school culture or maintaining reforms. Recommendations are offered in the areas of site-based decision making, training for leadership teams, integration of Yup'ik cultural knowledge, teacher education, and state policy. The results of student, graduate, teacher, and parent surveys are included. (Contains 25 data tables and figures.) (SV)

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NEW STUYAHOK

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Closing the Gap: Education and Change in New Stuyahok

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CLOSING THE GAP:
EDUCATION AND CHANGE IN NEW STUYAHOK

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When I first visited New Stuyahok and was hired, I asked the question, "What does the village want?" They responded, "We want the school to be part of the community." It was real easy to understand what they wanted. (Rod Mebius, principal and case study team member, 1997)

This is KDLG Dillingham, Alaska. It is now 10:25 a.m., October 5th and time for our public service radio messages. Our first Bristol Bay Messenger goes to the land planner in Portage Creek: Alice will be out today. To my husband upriver (trapping) on the Mulchatna: we have company—please come home. And our last message goes to New Stuyahok and to the students in the Cross-Cultural Education Development Program of the University of Alaska: Jerry Lipka will be arriving this afternoon.

After rushing out to the Dillingham airport to catch the Cessna 207 (a seven-passenger plane), I waited an hour for take off. Lifting in a steep vertical climb, we leveled off heading northeast for the village of New Stuyahok, a community of approximately 440 people. Snow was on the low mountains and ice was forming in the Nushagak River. The tundra gave way to forested areas along the riverbanks, and further upriver the forest opened up, looking like islands across the tundra. We landed 30 minutes later in New Stuyahok. The village is not connected by the road system. The means of travel changes accordingly by season, along with subsistence hunting and fishing. The homes in this village, as in many others, are typically grouped by extended families and cluster around fish racks, sheds, caches, and steambaths.

It was fall; the smell of burning wood filled the air. A few months ago, most villagers were at their Lewis Point fish camp on the lower Nushagak River. The wooden fish racks were laden with drying salmon for winter food. Now the villagers were returning to their winter routines, including schooling.

The regional center for this area is Dillingham (population approximately 2,200). Air transportation is still the major means of travel between Dillingham and the surrounding villages, including New Stuyahok. Snowmobiles and boats are used in the

appropriate seasons. Besides the school, other institutions in the village include a health clinic, the mayor's office, and the village council and corporation.

The School

The New Stuyahok school today is a comprehensive K–12 school with 149 students. Enrollment has increased approximately 30% in the last six years and is projected to increase further. The student population is comprised of 98.1% Alaska Native, with the vast majority being Yup'ik Eskimo; 1.8% is Caucasian. The school is part of the Southwest Regional School District (SWRS). There are also three other school districts in Bristol Bay: Dillingham City Schools, Bristol Bay Borough School District, and Lake and Peninsula School District.

In 1981, there was only one telephone in the village; long-distance communication occurred through radio telephones, citizen bands, and public service announcements. The Yup'ik teachers in the district at that time accounted for less than 3% of the teaching staff. The Southwest Region School District and the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) worked together to increase the number of Alaska Native teachers.

A case study provides an opportunity to learn something about a particular situation. The focus of the New Stuyahok school and community case is educational reform in general and the role of Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) in particular. This case, "Closing the Gap," refers to the gap between students' academic performance and their academic potential. This case describes and analyzes the ongoing changes occurring in New Stuyahok and SWRS between 1992 and the present. In particular, there is a trend toward higher academic expectation and performance. Most notably, more students are attending postsecondary schooling. Further, a communication gap has been narrowed between school and community, transforming conflict and distrust into a constructive and meaningful dialogue.

Cases in general try to answer "What can be learned?" It is necessary to view a case as part of a system that consists of those aspects of the larger social environment that connect to school and community (L. Smith, 1978). To more fully understand the increasing educational attainment by students in New Stuyahok, it is necessary to view these gains

not only in the immediate context of schooling but in the larger social context. To accomplish this, the case study is presented in four sections:

- setting the stage,
- a review of educational reform in New Stuyahok and Southwest Region School District during the past five years,
- increasing community voice and student experience of schooling, and
- suggestions, recommendations, and conclusions.

Setting the Stage

This case study shows that the school and community of New Stuyahok, and SWRS in general, are closing the educational gap between higher standards and expectations of and for their students. To describe this achievement as a "closing of the gap" invites a deeper contextual analysis of the factors affecting schooling. The case study links district policy and actions on the one hand and school outcomes on the other. Here we are not speaking of proofs or causes but suggesting a relationship between intentions and outcomes.

Many factors affect student outcomes. Closing the communication gap between school and community needs to be viewed in a larger context in which important social and educational processes are at work. For example, improved communication may be, in part, a function of increased English language proficiency of the community and the fact that the present generation of parents have all attended school while the preceding generation had attended schooling in a limited manner or not at all. Increased educational attainment and familiarity with schooling by community members may be factors contributing to positive changes. They may also be the results of deliberate actions and policies of the school district, such as a deliberate effort to increase communication between school and community. By viewing changing contextual factors, the case study may heighten or sharpen the understanding of school achievements and accomplishments. By taking multiple factors into consideration where possible, this case study will indicate the accomplishments of the school district and simultaneously make suggestions for furthering these efforts.

Besides closing the educational and communication gap between the school and community, other societal factors have been actively changing the social landscape in New Stuyahok during the past four decades. These include changing economic conditions from a subsistence-based economy to an increasingly cash-based economy of higher wages and increased access to the larger consumer-oriented society. Before the early 1950s, most residents had no formal Western schooling. Now a growing cadre of New Stuyahok residents have completed a four-year college degree, and an increasing number of residents have attended postsecondary schooling. These changes affect the social context as well.

Theoretically, closing the gap is part of a larger context. Viewed in this contextual manner, the processes unleashed by the AOTE (bringing school and community together, planning, setting and meeting goals, and evaluating the progress), have begun to alter a set of historical circumstances that, in the past, cast school and community in opposition to one another.

Brief Historical Overview

Between 1918 and 1952, the village of Stuyahok was located near the mouth of the Stuyahok River, at the confluence of the Mulchatna and the Stuyahok rivers. The people lived a seminomadic life of hunting, fishing, and gathering. Between 1950 and 1952, Chief Ivan Blunka petitioned the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to provide on-site schooling for the children of the village. The agency turned down the request, saying that "it was too far upstream from Dillingham" (Chief Ivan Blunka, personal communication, approximately 1985). Villagers tell how Chief Ivan Blunka and others decided that they would move the entire village to its present location on the Nushagak River to meet the BIA's condition for schooling, i.e., being closer to Dillingham. The villagers moved the village and, according to community members, Chief Blunka and others built and donated the first school, which was also Chief Blunka's home. Moving the village and building the first school show an exceptional degree of cooperation on the part of the community.

A brief history of the village shows the extraordinary degree to which change is a major factor in schooling and in the village and in the relationship between the two. The following 1966 BIA account describes New Stuyahok:

> The present village is the third site that local residents can recall. The first, or "Old Village," was moved in 1918 to a site several miles up river from the present location. Between 1918 and 1942, the village was engaged in reindeer herding for the U.S. Government and, according to arrangements, built up its own herd. The village then moved (1942) to its present location for better access to the Bristol Bay salmon fishing industry and as a better location for a school. The U.S. Post Office was established on July 1, 1961.
>
> Population
>
> Thirty families comprising one hundred eighty-eight people are residents in the community according to a school census (1966) (p. 1). Communication is available through the Alaska Communication System via radio-telephone using a receiver and transmitter available in the village (pages 4–5).
> Village electrification does not exist here yet (page 5).
> Wood is the main source of heat for the homes and is transported to the village by dog team (page 5).
> No store is located in the village, although one is certainly needed.
> Only one man, the postmaster, and one woman have permanent jobs.

In 1966, nearly all adults and children were fluent Yup'ik speakers, and only some adults and children spoke English.

The federal government organized Alaska's schooling. Federal law mandated a dual school system in Alaska: one system for white children and another for Native children. *De jure* racism was part of school history in rural Alaska. Prejudicial treatment of Yup'ik Eskimos was structurally part of the system of education as mandated by federal laws in 1900 and 1905, and continued until the 1960s. Jacquot (1973) wrote: "legislation reinforced that position and those series of acts, of 1900, 1905, 1912, and 1917, instituted and institutionalized a system of educational segregation possibly unheard of outside the old American South" (p. 60). Kopenon (1964) distinguishes the type of segregation occurring in Alaska from that of the deep South. He states: "it is structural and geographical, owing to the existence of a dual public school system operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs for native students" (p. 1). A legacy of the dual school system was an inferior education for Alaska Natives, and this legacy was compounded by geographic isolation. As noted earlier, New Stuyahok did not receive a teacher or a school

before the early 1950s because they were "too far away." Further, since almost all local inhabitants were Yup'ik Eskimo, geography, social structure, and federal law all combined to create a system of educational separateness, following a hierarchical caste-like system of whites on top, followed by half-breeds, Natives, and "uncivilized Natives."

The advent of schooling in the community was not without cost. The following anecdote reports a conversation with one of the first New Stuyahok school attendees and his father. The conversation directly reflects the conflicting messages between home and school and between the generations.

> Anyway, I was having a lot of fun. I was enjoying myself in the classroom. I was proud of myself for learning. Sometimes I would go home and talk with my dad. My dad, of course, talks Yup'ik. I would tell my dad in Yup'ik, "You know, dad, I learned something in school." Then I would pick out a book, and I would read him this book. I was really proud of myself. My dad would look at me, and he would just laugh. "How come, dad, you laugh at me?" I would ask. He would say, "you try to be like a white man." And I would say, "Really?" And then I would say, "Well, tomorrow, dad, I'll go back to school. I'm going to learn more about this white-man thing. And I'll come back to you, and then I'll read to you these things." He would look at me, and he would laugh at me in his own funny way. That made me start to think. (William Gumlickpuk, personal communication, 1986)

John Gumlickpuk, William's father, equated schooling with being white and with changes in ways of behaving, valuing, language, culture, and thinking.

Orvik's (1975) study quotes bilingual Yup'ik teachers-in-training from southwest Alaska, some of whom are active in the district's education today. These teachers-in-training describe the gap between schooling and community, particularly in regard to the Yup'ik language and culture. "Recollections, by the trainees, of early school experiences give evidence for the legitimacy of the bilingual approach in a very direct way. John Bavilla stated,

> . . . I didn't learn as much as I should have just because I didn't understand the teacher. I think that it will be a good program for the Eskimo children for that reason. . . . I know how it feels to not understand your teacher and just be left out.

What Moses Kritz says: "I want them to speak in Eskimo" (p. 29).

> Further, Moses said: "What about our culture? Are we going to teach about certain things in our culture . . . the way they used to dance, hunt, things like that?"
> Joe Alexie: "Yes, we could invite the older people in to help us out. . . ."
>
> [Orvik continues,] There was generally strong feeling about the need to orient the classroom environment to the Eskimo world of experience. I think this should alert program planners to the absolute necessity of establishing good role relationships between the white teacher and the native bilingual instructor because they literally represent the confrontation of two cultures each making a legitimate claim to part of the attention of the Eskimo child. To strike a balance that will meet his needs should occupy a significant part of the preparation for next year's instruction. (p. 31)

From fear of speaking Yup'ik in school to suggesting ways of closing the gap between school and community, this 1966 study sets the stage for contemporary schooling in New Stuyahok and Southwest Region Schools.

The educational gap was also reflected in issues of power and control, i.e., who runs the school, who decides the curriculum, and who makes school policy. Although the community initiated local schooling, policy still resided with federal bureaucrats and educationists. Shifting educational control from distant centers to local control, from Washington DC to Juneau, to Dillingham, and now partially New Stuyahok, was a process started in the 1960s that still continues today. These historical circumstances form the basis upon which current school reforms must work to continue to close the gap between the educational institution and the community.

Methodological Considerations

This section has two main parts: types of data collected and methodological issues and approaches to ensure valid data. The basic data comprising this case study includes:

- interviews with school personnel;
- students (in and out of school), school surveys (conducted by the school and by independent researchers);
- achievement test scores;
- first language dominance scores;

- ACT scores, number of high-school graduates attending college;
- on-site observations.

These data sources were tabulated, tables created and analyzed, and trends indicated. However, to go beyond quantifiable data and to provide meaning to deeper issues of schooling requires qualitative data to augment the quantitative data. Reform in schooling and excellence in education are more than test scores. Deeper issues pertaining to learning, attitudinal indices, and a host of relationships between student and teacher, teacher and community, student and community, and teacher and student and community and administration all interact with and impact notions of school reform.

Collecting and examining data on both the school and the community and examining the relationship between the two brings out patterns that may affect school achievement. By comparing and contrasting this case to others in similar circumstances, changes over time may be seen as part of a pattern. Combining the data in multiple ways may bring to light the factors affecting schooling. For example, the correlation between achievement test data scores and high family income accounts for approximately 50% of this relationship. Changing economic circumstances, changing educational attainment, and school and teaching stability are part of some of the structural circumstances affecting schooling. These are included in the present case study. The methodology includes the technique of comparison, and as Stake (1994) suggests, "quantitative case researchers will try to provide some comparisons, sometimes by presenting one or more reference cases, sometimes by providing statistical norms for reference groups from which a hypothetical reference case can be imagined" (P. 241). Providing interpretations and the possible meaning of data raises the concern of the validity of a particular case study. To mitigate unwarranted interpretations, researchers use a "process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation . . . but triangulation also serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomena are being seen" (Stake, 1994, P. 241; see also Denzin, 1989; Goetz and LeCompte, 1984).

The following table highlights the data collected and analyzed for this case study.

Table 1
Data Collected for This Study

Data Matrix Summary	Data Years	FREQUENCY	ENTERED	ANALYZED	CHANGE	NEEDS
Data Type						
Achievement Tests						
1. Standardized Test Scores	1989–1998	1 per year	yes	yes	yes	
2. ACT achievement scores	1991–1998	1 per year	yes	yes	yes	
3. Writing Samples	1992–1998	1 per year	yes	yes	~	
4. Language Dominance	1979–1997	1 per year	yes	yes	~	
5. Criterion-referenced Tests	1993–1997	1 per year	yes	no	yes	
Surveys/Questionnaires						
Carole Seyfrit's study—A Survey of AK HS Students	1995	1	no	yes		
1997–98 District Survey—CSMimpact	1997	1	yes	yes		
AK State Report Cards—New Stuyahok	1995–1997	1 per year		yes		
High School Survey—Lipka/Hastings/Mebius	1998	1	yes	yes		
Past Graduates—Group interview	1998	1	yes	yes		
Nadia Gumlickpuk—Individual interview	1998	1	yes	yes		
Cowan—Individual	1998	1	yes	yes		
Don Evans—Individual	1998	1	yes	yes		
Rod Mebius—Individual	1996–1998	3?	yes	yes		
Community Survey/Meeting	1996–1997	2?	yes	yes		
Prior Relevant Research						
Harrison study of Manokotak	1985			yes		
Lipka study of Manokotak	1994			yes		
Orvik studies of Bilingual	1975			yes		

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Table 1
Continued

Observational

New Stuyahok	1996–1998					
School level	1996–1998	4				
Classroom	1996–1998	2				yes
Student artifacts						yes
Manokotak	1997–1998					
School level	1997–1998	Aprox 4		Yes	yes	
Classroom	1997–1998	4 per visit		Yes	yes	
Student artifacts	1997–1998	Manokotak		Yes	yes	

Limits of the Study

The following list highlights some limitations of the present study.

- very limited classroom observations;
- limited observation of teachers planning, developing, and establishing curricular priorities;
- researcher and research began after the intervention took place;
- study is not definitive, nor an experimental design.

Review of Educational Reform

AOTE and other reform programs are, in effect, efforts at accomplishing two major goals:

- increasing community involvement and decision making, including active communication between school and community, and
- improving student performance both academically and socially.

In settings such as New Stuyahok, where geographical distance and federal legislation combined to create a "dual school system," reform is particularly complex.

One of the outcomes of this situation is rapid teacher turnover. Many of the teachers who come to teach in rural Alaska are from places outside of Alaska. They generally stay between two and four years, while a smaller percentage stays between one to two years. The result of this rapid teacher turnover is a culture of schooling in which many teachers are inexperienced, rapid turnover is the norm, and the curriculum gets changed constantly instead of being stabilized by the wisdom of practice. To add to this situation, not only are many of the teachers unfamiliar with the students and the community, but they teach outside of their subject areas, particularly at the high-school level.

Increasing Community Voice

Cross-Cultural Educational Development Program

The Cross-Cultural Education Development Program (X-CED) is included in this section on reform efforts because of its role in New Stuyahok and beyond and because of its possible interactive effects on AOTE and other reform efforts. At our January 1997 planning meeting and at our subsequent research/AOTE meeting in New Stuyahok, the X-CED program was mentioned by individuals and groups as contributing to school reform. In addition, one member of the AOTE research team worked for X-CED, and a number of the teachers at New Stuyahok are X-CED graduates. During 1993 to the present, between two and five graduates from this program taught in New Stuyahok.

Brief Description of X-CED

Today the percentage of Alaska Native teachers in SWRS school district, where the X-CED program has been operating continuously since 1971, is approximately 25%. Statewide, there are approximately 350 Alaska Native teachers, and over 200 of these graduated from X-CED (personal communication from the founder of the program, Ray Barnhardt, 1994).

The X-CED program allows rural students who live in villages to take courses in their home villages through audio-conferences, site visits by field-based faculty, and attending regional and statewide student meetings. Despite the hard work required to complete a college degree in a village, the program is perceived by some teachers, administrators, and campus-based faculty as being inferior to campus-based education. Two justifications are typically offered: the program is not located on campus, and it is a Native-oriented program. In fact, at the time of this writing, the program is being phased out.

With 41% of the certified staff having graduated from or taken student teaching from the X-CED program, it clearly has impacted New Stuyahok school. It appears that teachers from this program play a leadership and liaison role between school and community. Evidence for this exists in the fact that local teachers, such as Margie Hastings, a graduate of UAF and a member of the AOTE process and the present research group, was instrumental in organizing the March 1997 planning meeting. There is also evidence that X-CED graduates have a lower turnover record than their non-local counterparts. Rod Mebius noted:

> I think the X-CED program . . . is [an] important concept of hiring local people, Native people, in our schools. Less staff turnover in both classified and certificated. . . . There are lots of community involvement in our schools . . . people being in our school, volunteering, positive interaction with CSC and regional board in part because of continuity on these boards. People serve because of legitimate concern for the students and the community not because of perks.

Don Evans (1998) stated that "Native teachers who implement [local] curriculum are bound to help that curriculum." One additional impact of X-CED, in cooperation and coordination with SWRS, was the establishment of the Ciulistet [Leaders].

Ciulistet and Culturally Authentic Curriculum

The Ciulistet group was established in 1986/87 under the leadership of then SWRS Superintendent John Antonnen. He viewed the local Yup'ik teachers as the educational leaders of this region; since they were the long-term residents, they needed to play a vital role in the region's future. Antonnen allocated funds for Ciulistet meetings and was

supportive of the group in other ways as well. In addition, UAF contributed funds for Ciulistet members to attend meetings in the region and for national and international conference presentations on indigenous education.

The Ciulistet group has conducted a number of studies on Yup'ik classroom discourse patterns, Yup'ik teachers' ways of organizing classrooms, and how Yup'ik teachers bring their culture into the classroom. This work has had an impact on the newly hired Yup'ik teachers, as Margie Hastings recently noted: "It was an eye opener for us new teachers that we can teach our way. That it is okay. We got to see how other Native teachers taught. Then I knew it was okay" (personal communication, 1997).

In 1990–91, the group decided to include elders. Local knowledge, particularly in science, math, and geographical place names, was incorporated into the school system. To that end, the SWRS is involved with two National Science Foundation grants at UAF. One is entitled "Adapting Yup'ik Elders' Knowledge," to develop a Yup'ik-based elementary school math curriculum. The other is Alaska's Rural Systemic Initiative (ARSI). These two grants are connecting local and traditional Yup'ik knowledge to the teaching of Western science and math in schools.

Because of increasing numbers of local Yup'ik teachers, growing from less than 3% to over 20% from the late 1970s to the present, it has become possible to tap local knowledge and include it in the district's curriculum. In addition, local teachers have increased school stability, since local teachers remain, on average, three times longer than teachers from outside of Alaska. Further, local teachers, as noted by Rod Mebius and Don Evans, serve as a bridge between school and community by connecting curriculum to students' prior learning (Hollins, 1996). They also perform a leadership role in processes such as AOTE, as well as in other efforts.

Closing the Academic Gap and the AOTE Process

Closing the Gap Between School and Community

Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) began in 1992 in New Stuyahok and continued the efforts begun earlier under a grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust. The

AOTE process initiated by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), was based on the belief that central to students' success was a positive working relationship between school and community. To mend the historical rift between school and community, AOTE established a process where the school and the community worked together to set goals and evaluate those goals. These and other reform programs and processes are, in effect, efforts at accomplishing two major goals:

1. increasing community involvement and decision making, including active communication between school and community; and
2. improving student performance both academically and socially.

These two goals are, in effect, global variables.

The AOTE process is one way to bring stability and guidance to schools where high staff turnover is a fact of life. This process and strategy then becomes part of a larger attempt by the district to alter the culture of the school toward one in which stability, planning, and change are not random events but part of a process of planned change. Janelle Cowan, assistant superintendent of SWRS, explained how the AOTE process fit into the district's plans:

> When the opportunity arose to be part of an AOTE grant, both the board and the superintendent saw its potential. We had attempted a few other strategic processes with varying degrees of success, but in my opinion, the AOTE process has been a model that has worked for the district. The focus on community members leading the process was a key element for our success. The process enabled school personnel, parents, students, and community members to dialogue about problems and seek solutions. There is a tremendous sense of ownership in the value statements, mission, and outcomes that continue to guide our programs. When the superintendent who started the process left, the Board chose a new superintendent who would continue the AOTE process. Even with staff turnover at site, we have a common vocabulary and process which guides the new staff and makes their transition easier. (Janelle Cowan, personal communication, July 1998)

Further, Cowan stated:

> From my first years with the district to my last years with the district there is a much greater cooperative effort between the school and the community for the common good of the children. I think also just having teachers go into the community for parent-teacher conferences has helped. This has

> been more common over the past few years. Parents are more accepting of having visitors into their homes. During the school year they may have parent conferences at school or at home. This has occurred more often during the past five years. (Janelle Cowan, personal communication, July 1998)

Don Evans, superintendent of SWRS, wrote:

> [We are] committed to a restructuring of our high school programs and delivery model. The approach, as it was begun, was not intended to be superficial nor cosmetic. On the contrary, the district knew that to accomplish the changes necessary, and to provide quality programs across the District, there had to be systemic change. (*Totem Tales*, October/November 1997 p. 5)

Further, he was committed to: "the acceptance of the premise that our existing village bush schools were not producing the desired results. Our schools were not getting the job done." This recognition led to planned change.

Closing the Gap in School Performance: Teachers Teaching in Their Content Area

As part of the school district's planned changes related to AOTE, the school district established the Effective Rural Schools (ERS) model, piloted in 1994–1995 school year. It was implemented in all SWRS sites by the 1995–1996 school year.

The model included: teachers teaching in their subject areas, relevant and integrated curriculum, and restructuring the school year into 3 12-week trimesters. This restructuring would allow teachers to organize "block courses" and students to concentrate in special thematic courses such as child development or Emergency Medical Technician training. Further, students spent more concentrated time in block courses. The delivery of the program was changed to include rotating itinerants who taught part of the high-school program in the smaller high schools, while the math and language arts teachers would be permanently stationed at the school site.

Enhancing School/Community Relations:
How are the School and Community Sharing Responsibility?

One of the key educational gaps in rural Alaska schooling is the question of "whose school is it?" Oftentimes when community members are asked this question, their response has been the state, the school's, or the district's (Lipka, 1994). The SWRS district, aware of this perception and responsibility of schooling, wanted to have local schools and communities become more responsible and initiated a number of reforms to accomplish this. The AOTE process, according to Superintendent Don Evans, enabled the school and the community to talk, plan, and evaluate the progress made on their goals. He also felt that site-based management, with responsibility and authority, promised to reverse the sentiment behind the question of "whose school is it." Local schools and communities could tailor educational programs to their unique desires.

The following interview with Don Evans (July 1998) details his vision for increasing local control of schooling.

> I think that we put the burden on the school and the community. This is your goal, your plan, and we will make sure that you have the resources. You have to do this, giving them ownership and the feeling that the school is theirs. Also, they need to feel the responsibility for the plan's success.
>
> Because of this attitude and change we revised the whole budgeting process for the district. What we do is allocate funds through a formula. Each site took part in developing the formula. Sites get an equitable share of the pie (with few exceptions such as legal mandates). So, we issue a budget then they have the discretion of changing it. If a school wants 5 aides and 13 teachers instead of different mix we will accommodate it. We cannot hold a community and a school responsible if they don't have the authority and the discretion to meet their goals and to have some control over their goals. To meet the goals of the AOTE process then you have to give them responsibility and the power to meet the goals. All of this is within the parameters of the state regulations and district policy. Within those parameters they are free to make those decisions. The term we use is site-based decision making.
>
> You can evaluate and plan for your school through your AOTE process. If you are trying to make major changes then this is one of the key factors to allow changes to take place.

Beyond budgetary considerations and site-based management, the school district has also initiated Village School Improvement Plans. School and community cooperate in planning, goal setting, and evaluating the degree to which goals are met.

Closing the Communication Gap

The changes initiated by the AOTE process in school governance and in the relationship between school and community have been institutionalized in SWRS. For example, Don Evans noted: "We have expanded the CSC (local school advisory boards) with additional members—staff, parents, and students and other community members. This is written into the board policy. This comes from the AOTE process of having a broad-based community involvement" (personal communication, July 1998).

Enhancing School/Community Relations

Specifically in New Stuyahok, the AOTE process included holding meetings in the village, identifying community needs, and establishing action plans to meet those needs. These efforts speak directly to the larger issues of school community relations and ways of enhancing them.

The following Action Plan was developed during a community meeting in 1995 in New Stuyahok:

- More community involvement in meeting and teaching the AOTE goal
- Increased use of community instructors
- Increased village pride in Yup'ik culture and language
- The school will reflect the community's culture

Action Steps	**Timeline**
Restructure and expand existing curriculum and classes	May 1995
Revise, restructure, and expand federal programs	May 1995

In-service on Yup'ik learning styles	May 1995
Lesson and material development	May 1996
Develop plan to involve all staff in goal	January 1996
Language and cultural activities are made available to students on a daily basis	May 1996
Yup'ik competencies taught by adults outside of school	May 1996

In addition to the plan and implementation schedule, an evaluation schedule was developed.

April 1998 Meeting

Of the 11 groups who met in April 1998 in New Stuyahok, 10 reported that this goal (increasing Yup'ik language competence) would be met when "students are able to speak fluently in both English and Yup'ik." Other outcomes and performance standards expressed by the community included "living a traditional lifestyle, telling Yup'ik stories, and demonstrating knowledge of their own culture and that of others." As a result of this meeting, a committee was formed to focus on the school's bilingual program and improve it during the 1998/99 school year. This included a "record keeping system in the 98–99 school year" to assess outcomes.

The district has made gains in connecting the local culture with the school curriculum. Don Evans stated:

> We have also made gains here but it is not yet to the level we want. The district does it because the community wants it then we call upon the site administrator and the site staff to facilitate that process. Then we ask the community to see if we have met what they have in mind. (personal communication, July 1998)

The meeting ended with an evaluation of the academic progress being made between the present year and the preceding one. Progress was rated as "adequate," but improvement could still occur. In follow-up interviews, some community members expressed their thoughts on the Yup'ik program.

> I have seen Yup'ik drawings, heard students speaking in Yup'ik, know what it means, but we only have a budget for one Yup'ik instructor. . . . We could have more Yup'ik instructors along with the teachers and the aides. This year it was happening when they started to speak in little Yup'ik sentences. (meeting with AOTE members from New Stuyahok, December 1998)

Curricular Changes: Closing the Gap Between Community and School

The following comments reflect systemic changes occurring within the SWRS school system and do not necessarily represent specific changes within the school and community of New Stuyahok.

SWRS uses a criterion-referenced testing program as a means of evaluating and monitoring student progress for the different curricular areas. In mathematics, SWRS has made a concerted effort to include local knowledge, and it is becoming a formal part of the district's curriculum and testing program. At the district level, other efforts are underway for connecting school knowledge and local knowledge and integrating the two into the formal structure of schooling. For example, Cowan states:

> We believe that utilizing the students' prior knowledge is critical in our instructional delivery. We base some of these beliefs on reading comprehension research. At the fall in-service Evelyn Yanez and Annie McCarthy demonstrated a storyboard, Evelyn doing it the Native way and Annie showing how the same story could effectively meet literacy objectives more closely associated with schooling and the Western culture. They showed this story could be taught using different strategies and would help students attain some of our competencies.
>
> We are doing a better job of connecting Native knowledge into the regular classroom. When we have Native certified teachers and aides working side by side we are getting phenomenal connection there. For example, in New Stuyahok Ann Edwards, a kindergarten teacher, has two aides working in her classroom and they are doing a great deal of using activities that focus on Native knowledge. (personal communication, May 1998)

In New Stuyahok, there is a focus on language and culture (Yup'ik and English). Janelle Cowan (1998) stated that:

> This has led to the formation of a dance group that is coordinated by both school and community. It is a shared responsibility, when and where they will perform.

> A survival trip occurs each year, and often the community organizes it. Individual teachers, such as Ann Edwards, encourage use of Yup'ik through songs. Older students come into the classroom to assist. Field trips, *akutaq* [Eskimo ice cream] parties, Nick Wyagon [an elder] telling stories, John Hanson [an elder and dog musher] bringing his lead sled dog into school, all of these represent some of the connections between the local culture and schooling that the staff wrote about. I attribute much of that to Evelyn Yanez's [the district's bilingual coordinator] efforts to make teachers comfortable with elders in the classroom, using local knowledge in the classroom, and encouraging community members to contribute their knowledge. (personal communication, 1998)

Wally Gust, a community leader from New Stuyahok, states that the community wants to "hold onto our traditions and culture as long as we can and as much as we can . . . we don't want to be left behind and we want to succeed in the 20th century" (personal communication, 1998).

Margie Hastings, a local teacher from New Stuyahok and a long-term member of the AOTE-related projects, says that the bicultural program is hands-on. It is an unequivocal success as parents talk about the program, show Margie's students' work, and let Margie know how proud they are of the students' accomplishments. These members from the village team, Margie, Wally, and Rod, all believe that everybody working together in a cooperative way makes the difference (personal communication, 1998).

The following description from Margie Hastings of how the school and the community work together highlights the role of local teachers in bridging school and community. Margie notes how local teachers are able to connect local knowledge to academic knowledge. She describes how she planned with another teacher, Irinia, who is from Russia and was visiting New Stuyahok.

> In the *maqi* [steambath] we planned how we would do our teaching. I discussed with Irinia how to connect to the community . . . your world and our world. She attended our church services . . . so they got to know her pretty well that way. In the classroom, she taught about the Russian world, but I told Irinia, if we show the kids something even closer to them like our language. I majored in Native languages, and I knew about loan words. We made up a list of English words, Russian words, Yup'ık words. That came to 30 to 50 words that were similar to the Russian/Yup'ik. To make sure I brought her to the *maqi* to talk to my grandmother, she would say, *pusqa* . . . my grandmother would be really amazed. *Allii!* [expression of surprise] We knew that there were Russian and Yup'ik language similarities. We found a whole bunch of words, Russian values related to the church . . . something that kids always practice. I told her about the

dress code in church and compared that to Russia . . . ladies in our community and in Russia use scarves. I used to wonder why my parents braided my hair and used bright red yarn. I found out that we adopted the Russian custom of doing this. In Russia red is considered lively and full of life. The kids got really inspired. We had a great big community tea. Everyone was invited to the open house about what the kids learned. Western world culture, Yup'ik world culture, Russian world culture and we filled up the walls, the floor etc. with what we learned. We brought tundra, Lipton tea. . . . I told Irinia to include visual cues. We are visual learners. Something visual would be good. She came up with Russian dance for the community. I had the kids write up Russian words in Russian and Yup'ik and their meanings. The community could see the relationship between Russian, Yup'ik, etc. The guy from the lower 48 would jump in to tell about things were connected. Overall this was a fun trimester. Before I left we had a going away party for John and Irinia. I wish we could have more people like this. What made it possible is that Irinia blended in. She did not come in with set values. She did not come and say that I will teach you guys. Blended and thought of ways to bring in many views. Many people come in with set ways. She blended in, know the village setting, and know where people are coming from.

I made a comment to Jerry [Lipka], 12 years ago, when I first started teaching. I taught the way I was told to teach, that was the Madeline Hunter method. Right now, I teach from my heart and my mind. I use my Native ways of feeling and I not feel like a fake. When I taught the Madeline Hunter method, good for some people, I felt really fake. It was not me. We have a superintendent and support staff that has been there for awhile. Even though we have a new principal, his approach is one of blending. That really helped. I am doing it my way. I think it is a better way. . . . I did it my way because it works. To top it off we had a talent show . . . do skits and dances, singing, we had Irinia share Russian dances, all worlds. Kids see that if people work together it could be really positive. I concentrate more on how I feel, because there is support now.

We had an open house. We packed up the whole gym. They were most interested in the integration of Russian and Yup'ik. The community has many Russian names. The community did not know that 50% of the names in New Stuyahok had Russian names. Many communities have Russian names. (personal communication, 1998)

This may be why Don Evans stated that "we want to increase Native staff. I think that the district is focusing on Native hire and we are seeing how the increases will come faster" (personal communication, July 1998).

In addition to the contributions of local teachers and closing the communication gap between school and community, the AOTE process has fostered changes in the school

district that relate to increased student success in postsecondary schooling. Don Evans stated: "More kids are entering college and graduating from college. Less than 20% of our kids even attempted college eight years ago and now over 50% are attempting college. In 1994 we had only one person make it through college now we have several people through the 3rd and 4th year." Evans continued:

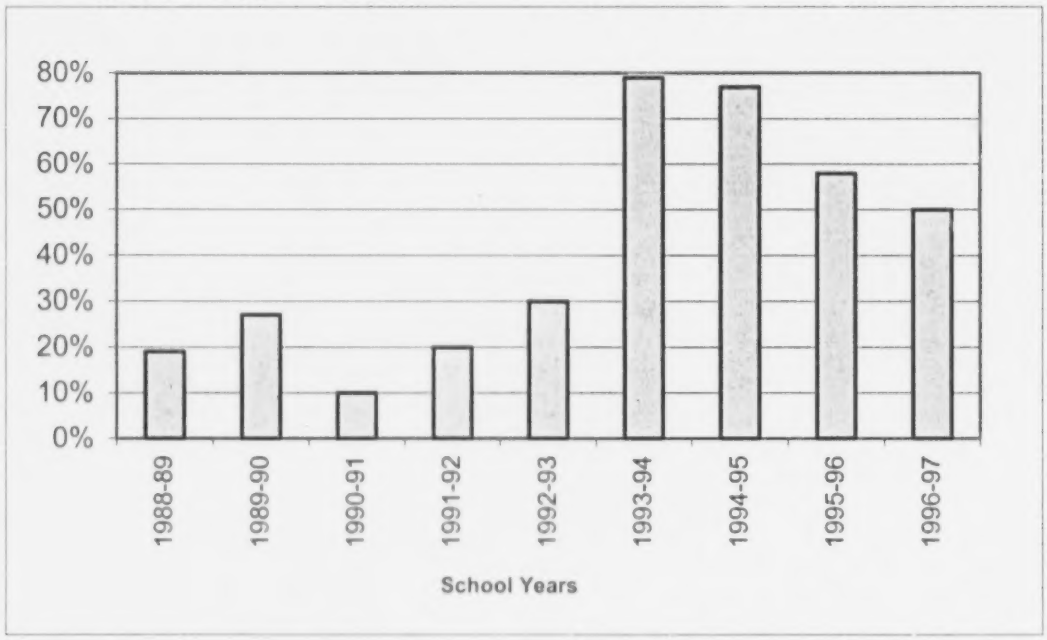
> I think it is that we have begun the AOTE process and made community members have some ownership in the program. We listen to what their goals are for their kids. The AOTE process made the community members realize that they had these goals, and the situation of school and their program was not meeting these goals. They had to change both the school and the community to change the goals that the AOTE process has identified. We are trying to get our kids educated so that they can educate their own kids. For example, the changes in our high school program. The community made changes such as having higher expectations for academics, improved attendance, and expectations of success instead of an expectation of failure. The AOTE process caused an awakening and created a dialogue. The connection between good attendance and higher academic standards were not clear in each person's mind. Less than 50% of the parents graduated high school. You are expecting folks to understand what they did not experience. The dialogue that took place gave them an understanding of why we expect higher academic standards, better attendance. The AOTE process connected the dialogue and the community's goals.
>
> The family needs to support the child in college. Part of the dialogue that we had focused on how they need to support them. That is part of the support in college. Not only did support come from the community but also from the teachers. There had to be higher expectations. (personal communication, July 1998)

Improved Student Experiences and Learning: Closing the Educational Attainment Gap

This is the most demonstrable part of the story, where student learning has been positively affected on a number of independent outcome measures. From 1993 to the present, there has been a positive trend in student achievement, as indicated by more students attending postsecondary schooling, an improved ratio of highest-to-lowest quartile scores on standardized achievement tests, improved ACT scores, and higher scores on writing assessments. Before these important gains are explored, a word of caution. The degree to which student outcomes may or may not be associated with the

AOTE process is difficult to assign. At the present time, there is simply a lack of evidence to suggest one way or the other. However, after noting this caution, it is fair to state that student performance has risen along a number of different variables since the AOTE process was implemented. Foremost amongst them is the increase in the number of students attending postsecondary schooling, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1
Percentage of Graduates Entering Postsecondary School



Between 1988 and 1993, the percentage of SWRS seniors entering postsecondary schools ranged between approximately 10% and 30%. During 1993 it increased dramatically and ranged from approximately 50% to 80%. A similarly dramatic increase is also indicated by the number of students attending college upon graduating from SWRS (Table 2).

Table 2
Percentage of SWRS Seniors Attending College Between 1988 and 1997

Year	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Percentage	11%	21%	11%	13%	20%	56%	45%	42%	50%

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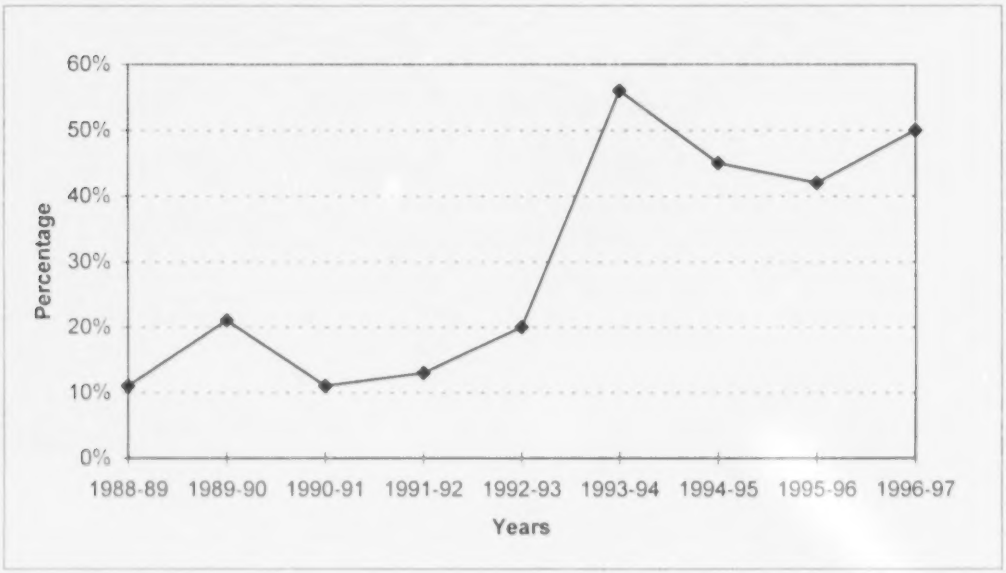
In 1992–93, 20% of the graduating class attended college. In 1993–94, 56% of the graduating class attended, representing a dramatic 280% increase. Between 1988 and 1993, the number of SWRS graduates attending college averaged approximately 15%, while between the years 1993–94 and 1996–97, graduates attending college averaged 48%. This rather exceptional increase, starting in 1993–94, continues through 1996–97, indicating that attending postsecondary schooling is becoming part of the school and community culture.

Figure 2
Percentage of SWRS Seniors Attending College Between 1988 and 1997



Interestingly, the number of students from Bristol Bay (this includes the three other school districts from this southwest region area) enrolling at UAF between 1988-89 and 1997-98 shows a quite similar profile to the SWRS school data on students attending college and postsecondary schooling. Instead of 1993 being the watershed year, it is 1994, with an almost 300% increase in the number of students attending UAF from the 1993 level. These numbers remain well above the average of the 1988 to 1993 time period (Figure 3). This may indicate that other forces operating within the region and state may be contributing to the change in numbers of students attending college, UAF in particular.

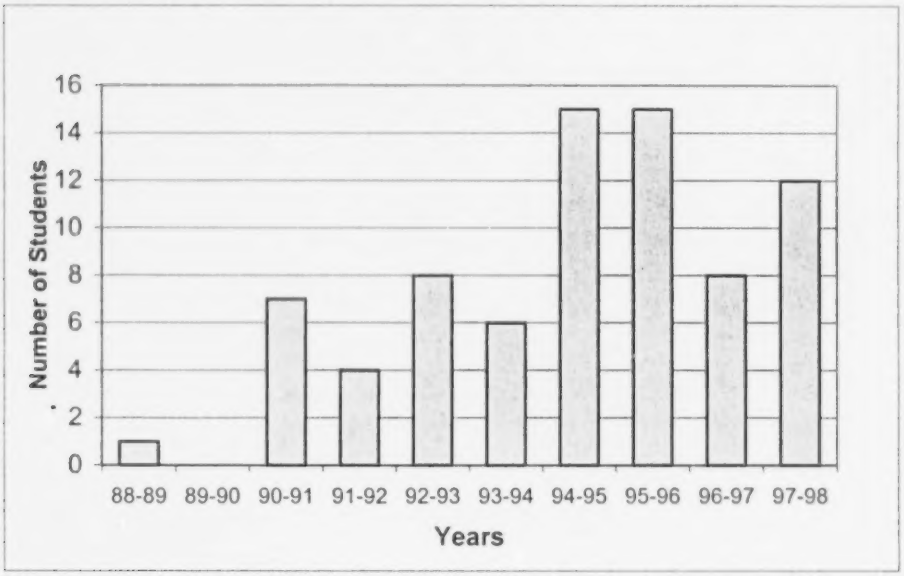
The Seyfrit (1996) study indicates a rather dramatic change in attitude toward college. Students perceive, according to this study, that nearly 40% of their grandparents oppose their attending college. Yet 78% of the surveyed students in SWRS stated that they wanted to attend college. Students' educational expectations far exceed the educational attainment of their parents and grandparents.

It is difficult to differentiate the "causes" behind this rather dramatic change in the number of students attending postsecondary schooling, college in particular. In general, the work of SWRS's transition counselor and changing attitudes within a rapidly changing social environment, interact to make this achievement possible. Don Evans, during an interview conducted in November 1998, made important connections between school policy changes directly related to the AOTE process:

> AOTE gets credit for changing the view of what is the mission of SWRS, expanding it to include college. Because the view changed to include post-secondary success, SWRS allocated resources. We got additional money through grants and were able to pay attention to our kids when they were away at college.

For example, during December 1998, SWRS sent a number of high-school seniors on an orientation trip to postsecondary schools in Alaska, including UAF. They met with current UAF students from various Bristol Bay communities, making the university campus more familiar to these high-school seniors.

Figure 3
Number of Bristol Bay High-school Graduates Entering UAF, 1988-1997



Paralleling the increased attendance at postsecondary schools is a steady increase in ACT scores of SWRS high-school seniors between 1991–1998 (Table 3 below). From 1995–96 to 1997–98, the gap between the test scores of students graduating from SWRS and taking the ACT test and state and national average scores narrowed. The differences in test scores between SWRS and the state average declined from 6.9 to 5.96, narrowing the gap by approximately 14%.

Table 3
Differences in ACT Test Scores Between SWRS, State, and Nation

Year	SWRS	State	National	Difference Between State and SWRS
1991–92	13.2	20.55	20.55	7.3
1992–93	14	20.7	20.7	6.7
1993–94	13.6	20.95	20.8	7.35
1994–95	14	21	20.8	7
1995–96	15.6	20.95	20.95	5.4
1996–97	14.2	20.9	20.9	6.7
1997–98	15.2	21	21	5.8

Don Evans noted that the 1998 junior class outscored the senior class on the ACT. There is a strong likelihood that next year's scores will continue to improve and continue to narrow the gap on this nationwide exam.

Criterion Referenced Tests

SWRS initiated a program of criterion referenced testing to more systematically test students, in order to track their progress and to identify the areas in need of improvement. Superintendent Evans set high goals for the district: 80% or more of each class had to meet the required competencies for its grade level and 100% of the competencies for the previous grade level. As the charts below indicate, there has been a steady increase in the competency scores for the district between 1993 and 1997. In language arts, for example, there has been a dramatic increase in competency test scores for all grades, culminating in 1997, when the desired expectations were met or surpassed. Similarly, there has been a steady increase in math, with a dip in 1995–96 scores but a substantial increase in competency scores in the 1996–97 school year.

Figure 4
Percentage of New Stuyahok K–3rd Grade Students Mastering 80–100% of required Grade-level Language Arts Skills

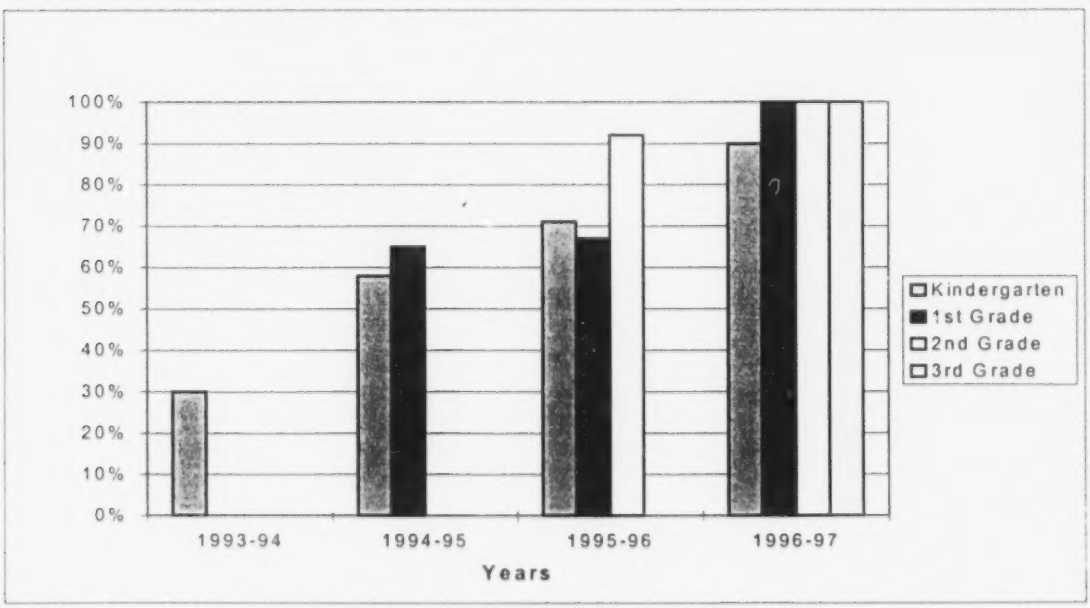


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Figure 5
Percentage of New Stuyahok K-3rd Grade Students Mastering 80-100% of Required Grade-level Math Skills.

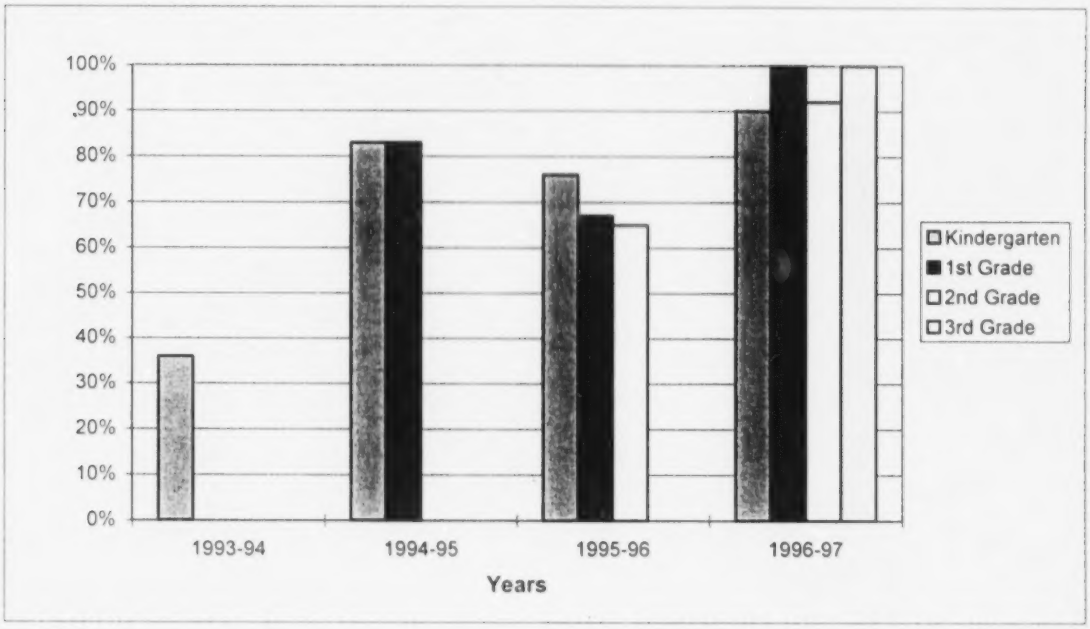
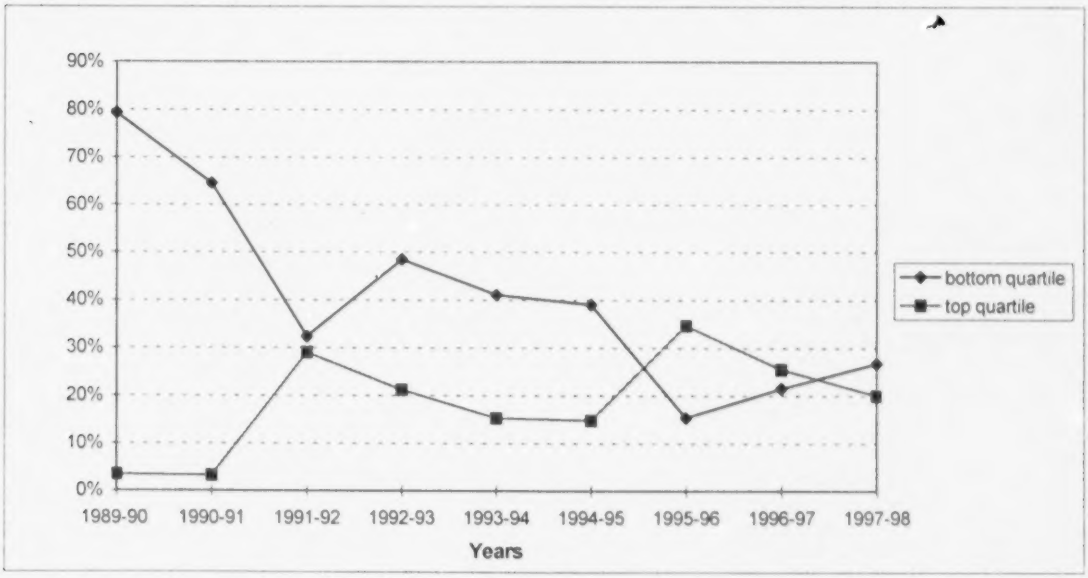


Figure 6
Top and Bottom Quartiles for SWRS on CAT/ITBS Scores for 8th Graders in Math



Achievement Test Scores

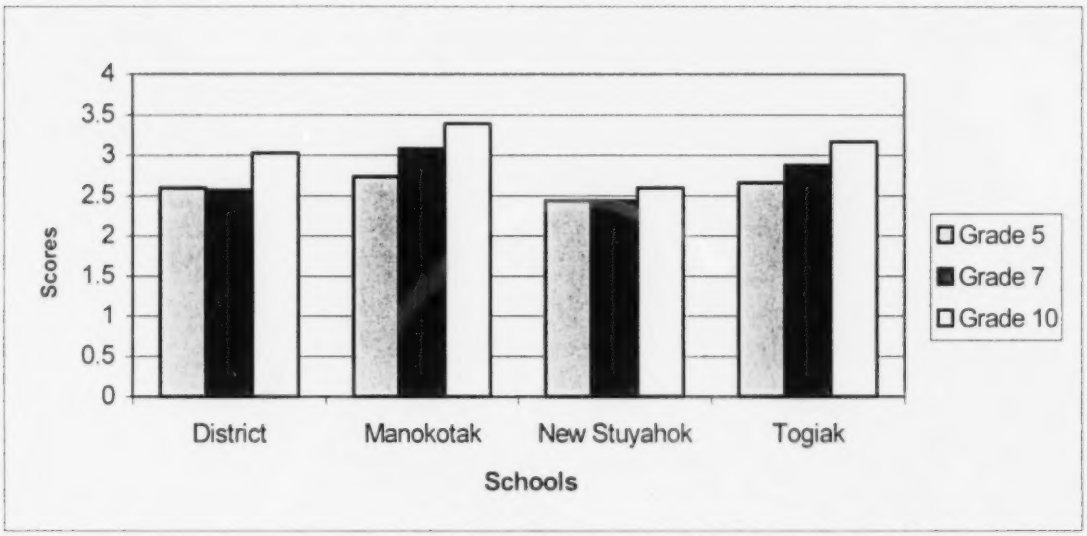
Between 1989 and 1998, fourth and eighth graders show a pattern of closing the gap between top and bottom quartile scores in language, reading, and math. This is a common measure used to show trends in test scores; it is one measure used by the State of Alaska in its "school report cards," and it is used here. This trend is most discernible in 8th grade math test scores. In 1995–96, the number of students scoring in the top quartile was more than the number of students scoring in the bottom quartile, as Figure 6 shows.

This trend, with the number of students scoring in the highest quartiles, continues at a higher level than in the previous years, but not quite at the level of 1995–96. In reading and language, scores continue to be flat, with no discernible increase in the number of students scoring higher in the top quartile than in the bottom quartile.

Writing Assessment

Writing assessment scores from New Stuyahok are one of the few academic indices showing no gains between 1992 and 1996. There is a net decrease score in the scores for fourth and eighth grade between 1992 and 1996. Not until 1996 do the scores rebound. When comparing scores on the 1998 Alaska State Writing samples, the New Stuyahok scores, when compared to the other two "large" high schools in SWRS, are the lowest of the three for grades 5, 7, and 10. (See Figure 7)

Figure 7
Comparison of SWRS Large High Schools and the District Average on the Alaska Writing Assessment



Yup'ik Language: An Unmet Goal of New Stuyahok

Two of the AOTE goals for New Stuyahok were: "Students demonstrate many forms of communication (e.g. reading, writing, and speaking in English, Yup'ik and other languages)" and "students understand, accept and appreciate their own language and culture and the culture of others." The table below shows that from 1979–80 and 1996–97, the number of students who spoke mostly English remained the same. There was no demonstrable change toward meeting the goal of students communicating in Yup'ik.

Table 4:
Language Dominance in New Stuyahok

Category	1979-80	1982	1989	1990	1991	1994	1995	1996-97
A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
B	5	0	1	1	1	9	8	9
C	0	5	1	1	0	0	0	0
D	81	79	72	74	80	95	118	135
E	8	6	14	13	8	4	5	8
F	0	0	0	0	0		0	

Definitions

A Students who speak Yup'ik exclusively
B Students who mostly speak Yup'ik
C Students who speak Yup'ik and English with equal ease
D Students who speak mostly English, but also speak some Yup'ik
E Students who speak exclusively English, but whose manner of speaking reflects the grammatical structure of another language
F Students who speak English exclusively, but do not fit category "E."

However, the community continues to support this goal. At the most recent AOTE-related meeting in New Stuyahok, community members in 10 out of 11 groups cited the importance of students being able to learn and/or speak Yup'ik. A number of suggestions by community people places some emphasis upon evaluating the goal by students' ability to speak Yup'ik. This goal is a difficult one to achieve, and it would take a very serious commitment on the part of the community to reach it. At the present time, dialogue, action plans, and evaluation from a community perspective offer a good way for the school and the community to consider their options for meeting this goal and specifying how it might be met.

Quality of School Life Indices

Data on the quality of school life for students comes from Seyfrit's (1996) study, the district-sponsored CSMimpact (1997) study, and interviews conducted by the AOTE study group with New Stuyahok high-school students during the 1997–98 academic year. The Seyfrit study shows that 94% of the students generally believe that they think well of themselves or have a high self-esteem. More than 70% think that drugs and alcohol are a problem in their communities. Eighty-five percent of the respondents think that SWRS's teachers encourage them, while 93% report that their parents are supportive of their

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education. Teaching Alaska Native culture received the highest percentage (48.45%) of "strongly agree." Students reported that school should spend more time teaching Native culture and language. The trend documented in 1996 by local residents, and their concern for orienting the school more toward the Yup'ik Eskimo culture, continues into the next generation.

Over 91% of the students believe that SWRS should prepare them for college. This student group views schooling as preparation for careers and college. These positive attitudes toward postsecondary schooling may also correlate with the high percentage of students attending postsecondary institutions from 1993-94 forward.

In the more recent CSMimpact study, elementary school students listed the following as needing improvement.

Table 5
Summary of CSMimpact Study

Elementary School Students' Priorities for Change	
Improve school facilities	52%
Re-evaluate quality and quantity of food served	20%
Uninteresting homework/lack of clear understanding of	28%
More opportunities for extra help	17%
Encourage students to participate in class	6%
Secondary School Students Priorities for Change	
Improve respect of math teacher to students	10%
Had a serious problem with their social studies teacher	12%
Students should help each other more	9%
Improve school libraries—increase holdings	51%
Principal should support student activities	27%
Counselors do a better job helping students prepare for ACT/SAT	23%
Rate their program good or excellent	63%
Quality of family involvement was good or excellent	54%
Quantity of family involvement was good or excellent	46%
Enough opportunities for family involvement	62%
Local culture was always or usually included	44%

The need to improve school facilities stands out the most. Over 50% of the students surveyed noted this as a priority.

The following student survey was conducted in December 1997. We (the classroom teachers, pricipal, AOTE case study member, and the researcher) met with most high-school seniors (19) and junior high-school students. The meeting was organized like an AOTE community meeting. Each group was asked to reflect on their school experience on the following topics: Bilingual, Bicultural, Academic, Extracurricula, and school and community. They were also asked to consider suggestions for improving schooling.

Table 6
New Stuyahok High-school Class—Survey December 16, 1997

Groups 1–3 are high-school students and group 4 and 5 are junior high school students.

Groups	Bilingual	Bicultural	Academic	Extra-curricula	School & Community
#1	Yup'ik and Russian classes, speaking and listening, world cultures, and story telling.	Intensive week working with the elders. Making crafts, ice picks, sleds, shooting, spirit camp, survival camp, and sewing.		Natural helpers, job shadowing	Teaching the younger generation. Need bigger school, more teachers, and better and bigger lunches.
#2	AFN Yup'ik classes, we had 3 years ago, Russian this year.	Survival trips, spirit camps, skin sewing, beading, carving, native dance, net making, and sled making. Elders telling us about our past.	Art, Russian, life sciences, EFT training	Native Youth Olympics, volleyball, job shadowing, carnivals, guest speakers	Support for students staying in school, making money for school activities, stricter about drugs and alcohol

#3	Comparing Russian and Yup'ik language. Russian language and Irinia.	1996–97 intensive week, survival camp, skin sewing, beading, hairnets. Elders and community people sharing. History of the elders.	Intensive week bicultural. Art	Job shadowing	Fund raising, dances, CSC meetings. Need bigger school & classrooms, cleaner school, more Native food, study hall after school, more Native teachers.
#4	Learning to talk in Yup'ik, Yup'ik songs	Carving bones, boats, birch baskets, beading, bracelets, necklaces, fur headdresses, survival and spirit camps		Sports, gym, Native dancing, talent show	Family nights, fund raising. Better counselors, bigger schools, bigger cafeteria
#5	We don't have Yup'ik	Weaving, sewing, making things, survival trip, hunting, and fishing.	Math is too easy, PE, music, play songs		Elders coming, feasts

As with the findings in the CSMimpact and the Seyfrit surveys, students value cultural activities, express interest in learning Yup'ik, and want the school to be bigger and better equipped.

Interviews of Graduates From New Stuyahok School

The following summarizes interviews with four recent New Stuyahok graduates. Each of them applied for and attended college. Their remarks are more oriented toward academic concerns than the general high-school population.

- Yup'ik was important
- College prep classes and challenging classes
- The Itinerant Program, especially in science
- The transition program
- Becoming independent

However, one sentiment that was repeated a number of times by these graduates: "There should be more challenging classes. College has a lot of challenges. Facing the challenges is better." One student stated:

> I learned more in six weeks at RAHI than I did all year at Stuy. I went to Upward Bound (Math/Science) during my sophomore year, Upward Bound Classic during my junior year, and RAHI this year. All the previous camps were good. Just in RAHI did I learn so much because it was college level. (interview with a recent graduate, June 1998).

Staffing Patterns

During the past four decades, rapid teacher turnover has been a concern expressed in both the state and local arenas. Some community members view staff turnover as a critically important issue, as expressed by the following sentiment: "Inexperienced teachers don't know anything about the community's way of living. They shouldn't have unreasonable expectations of the students. They need to visit the community" (interview with community members, December 1998). At the building and district level, concerns have centered on curricular issues, such as new teachers bringing in their own curriculum and creating an ad hoc curriculum discontinuous with district goals and students' experience in school. By the time a new teacher becomes oriented to Alaska village life, he or she tends to move on. Building a stable and cohesive faculty and school culture can clearly be undermined by rapid turnover. Sarason (1996), among others, reports on the

need to change the culture of the schools toward making them more productive learning environments. Rapid teacher turnover works against building a stable school culture.

SWRS, faced with rapid teacher turnover and teachers teaching out of their content area, has instituted an itinerant high-school program to change the culture of the school toward higher academic expectations and standards. However, fixing one problem may cause other problems, as indicated by some community members. "The itinerant program is tough on the kids because they get to know the person. The person goes and they have to start over again with a new teacher" (interview with community members, December 1998). Others felt that the New Stuyahok school was large enough to have permanent high school teachers.

The obvious trade-off between having subject matter specialists who are itinerants is increased academic competence but increased instability in relationships between teachers and students and teachers and the community. A further consideration in policies and practices is the overall teacher turnover rate. During March 1997, the AOTE team with the assistance of the school secretary collected data on teacher and staff tenure (Table 7).

Table 7
Years of Service 1997 Certified and Classified Staff Chief Ivan Blunka School Employment Survey, March 5, 1997

Certificated Teaching Staff

Yrs.	Employee name
1	Angela Williams
	William Williams
	Russ Burkhardt
2	Doug Badilla
	Dana Bartman
	Larry Bartman
	Priscilla McIntryre
	Richard Rohrbacher (itinerant)
	Minty Shope (itinerant)
3	Angie Martinez
4	Wendy Mebius

Classified Staff

Yrs.	Employee Name
3	Nick Chocknok
	Mickia Walcott III
4	Natalia Bond
7	Pauline Askoak
8	Blunka Wassilliey
11	Sophie Alexie
12	Tatianna Andrew
15	Anna Andrew

5	Ron Martinez	17	Sophie Walcott
6	Ann Edwards Rod Mebius	20	Moxie Andrew
		25	Nick Wonhola
7	Margie Hastings	28	Mary Hanson

In 1996–97, local teachers represent 37% years of service at the New Stuyahok School while nonlocals account for 63%. Years of service was calculated by multiplying the number of teachers (local vs. nonlocal) times their years of service. Although there were only four local teachers out of a total of 15 teachers (26%) they accounted for 37% of the total years of service. In other words, they stay longer on average than nonlocals. The percentage of years of service changes even more when the nonteaching staff is included. For the entire school staff (nonteaching and teaching), the locals represent 84% of the total years of service to the nonlocals 16%. This survey shows that the average tenure for certified teachers is 3.07 years, while for the nonteaching staff it is 12.75 years. This data begins to highlight the importance of local staff in creating a stable school environment. The figures below graphically represent the data.

Figure 8
Certified Teachers: Local and Nonlocal for 1996–97

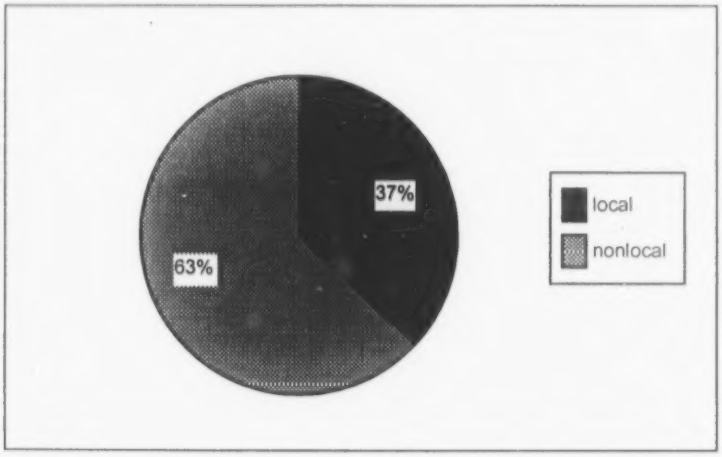

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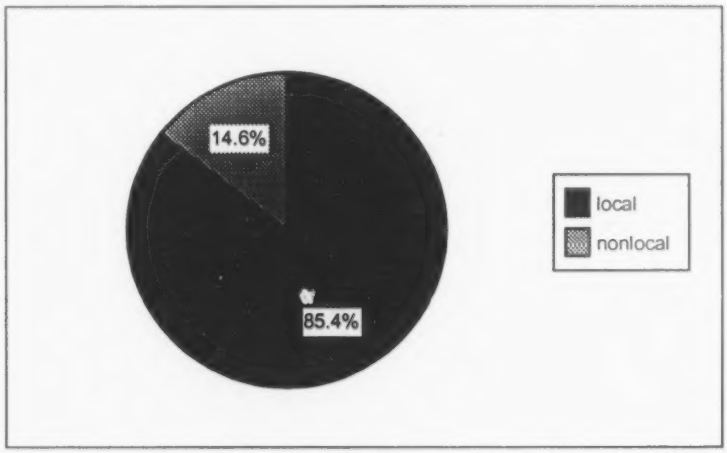
Figure 9
Staffing Patterns: Local and Nonlocal



At the end of the 1997 academic year, 5 of the 15 certified teaching staff, including the school principal, transferred or retired from the New Stuyahok school. This represents a 33% teacher turnover rate. As indicated above, most nonlocal teachers have only taught in New Stuyahok for one or two years. During the 1997–98 year, more teacher turnover occurred. Are these data anomalous? Do they reflect overall teacher retention rates across the district and over time? Tables 8 and 9, constructed from SWRS data, respond to the question of teacher retention rates.

Table 8
Years of Teaching Service—Insiders and Outsiders During 1992–93 School Year

Years of Service	Insiders	Percentage	Outsiders	Percentage
0		0%	4	14%
1	4	27%	6	21%
2	1	7%	5	18%
3	0	0%	5	18%
4	2	13%	1	4%
5	1	7%	0	0%
6	1	7%	1	4%
7	1	7%	1	4%
8	0	0%	0	0%

9	0	0%	0	0%
10	0	0%	0	0%
11	0	0%	0	0%
12	0	0%	0	0%
13	1	7%	5	18%
14	3	20%	0	0%
15	0	0%	0	0%
16	0	0%	0	0%
17	1	7%	0	0%

Table 9
Years of Teaching Service—Insiders and Outsiders During 1998–99 School Year

Years of Service	Insiders	Percentage	Outsiders	Percentage
0	4	20%	16	37%
1	2	10%	11	26%
2	0	0%	6	14%
3	3	15%	2	5%
4	2	10%	2	5%
5	0	0%	0	0%
6	0	0%	0	0%
7	2	10%	0	0%
8	0	0%	0	0%
9	0	0%	2	5%
10	0	0%	0	0%
11	0	0%	0	0%
12	1	5%	0	0%
13	1	5%	0	0%
14	0	0%	0	0%
15	0	0%	0	0%
16	0	0%	0	0%
17	1	5%	0	0%
18	0	0%	0	0%
19	1	5%	4	10%
20	3	15%	0	0%

The categories of "insiders" and "outsiders" are defined for these tables in the following manner: insiders are those teachers who are from the region or who have married into a family from the region; outsiders are those teachers who are from other parts of Alaska or from another state. Table 8 indicates that 71% of the teachers from outside of the region

have four years or less teaching experience in this district. Simultaneously, inside teachers with four years or less experience account for 47% of the total number of inside teachers. Comparing similar data six years later in table 9 reveals that 85% of the teachers from outside of the region remain as teachers in this district for four or less years, 80% of the outside teachers remain for three or less years, and 65% of the outside teachers remain for two years or less of service. The data indicates a sharp rate of teacher turnover. However, a distinctly different pattern emerges for inside teachers. Four years or less teaching in the district accounts for 45% of the inside teachers, almost half the teacher turnover rate of outside teachers. More importantly, 55% of all insider teachers have five years or more experience in this district. The data quite dramatically point out the high teacher turnover rate in the district, particularly among outside teachers.

Teacher stability resides with inside teachers with one important exception. There is a small group of outside teachers who remain in the district, presumably for their entire career. Four outside teachers are approaching their 20th year of teaching. This year two of those four teachers are retiring from the school district. The data were obtained from SWRS, percentages were rounded off to the nearest whole, and in some cases, the total number of teachers does not account for all of the teachers in the district. Data for some teachers was missing. See additional data in appendix F. It is also important to note that the noncertified staff represent another stable core of the school.

Quantitative data such as this speaks directly to issues of staff stability, school culture, practice, curricular continuity, and relationships between certified teachers, the community, and the students.

Suggested Recommendations and Conclusions

The following suggested recommendations and conclusions emanate from the various data collected during this case study, previously published studies, and personal experiences in rural and Native education. All of the following recommendations follow SWRS stated goals for improving schooling, and building continuity and stability in a context that has historically suffered from rapid teacher turnover. Much has been improved, but more can be accomplished.

Without doubt, there has been steady improvement and success in meeting the two major goals established by the district through the AOTE process. These goals include greater community voice and greater incorporation of the local culture and language in schooling. Academically, there has been a steady, and by some measures, a rather significant increase in the number of students attending college and other postsecondary schooling. An almost 300% gain in the number of students attending college clearly signals an important change in local attitude toward schooling and community support for schooling. These gains have held over the past five years, and this positive trend continues. ACT and other test scores indicate a narrowing of the academic gap, because of the steadily increasing number of students who have the chance to attend college and thereby participate in opportunities previously out of reach for many local residents. These accomplishments appear to be fairly equally distributed across SWRS, including New Stuyahok. It also appears that the AOTE process of creating a continuing dialogue between school and community and having a planned approach to the dialogue has been a positive factor. It is within the spirit of dialogue between school and community, and the narrowing educational gap between those who benefit by schooling and those who do not, that the following suggestions are tendered.

However, perennial problems such as rapid teacher turnover continue to undermine local and other efforts at school reform. During the three years of this study, the New Stuyahok school experienced major teacher and principal turnover (two principals during the course of the study). The current principal, the second one in three years, is leaving after the 1998–99 school year (see postscript for final remarks).

Suggestions

These suggestions will be organized in the following broad but interrelated categories:

- site-based management and local decision-making;
- curriculum and local culture;
- instruction and staff development;
- community involvement.

Site-based Management

Implementing site-based decision making and limited budgetary responsibility appears to be a powerful step in the direction of increasing community voice, increasing dialogue between school and community, and translating dialogue and voice into action plans. Further, site-based management offers the prospect for democratizing schooling and altering a historical set of relationships, where the school and community have been too often antagonistic.

Dialogue has led to action plans, goals, and evaluation of goals. Yet local turnover of teachers and principals continues to present difficult challenges to schools and communities in planning for change and implementing plans. To further ensure a steady and stable approach to improving site-based management, planning, and implementation, this report makes the following recommendations:

> Initiate or increase the in-service training for a representative team made up of **local leadership teams,** such as the expanded Community School Committees. The purpose of this training is to increase the capacity of local leaders, both school and community members, to understand the options available to them under the superintendent's plan for site-based management and to have the increased knowledge and skills to take advantage of the opportunity afforded them through site-based management. This recommendation follows both the spirit of the AOTE process and the superintendent's desire to increase local decision making.

In addition to the reasons stated above, the CSMimpact study showed favorable to very positive attitudes on all ratings, from teachers' and students' perceptions of schooling to satisfaction with the central administration. One suggestion for improvement in this report is to "encourage the School Board and Superintendent to ask employees for their suggestions and opinions, as appropriate." Further, the CSMimpact study suggested that this area accounted for a large percentage of the possible increase in satisfaction. This same study noted that staff and teacher satisfaction could be improved by increasing their involvement in defining policies.

The above suggestion, coupled with increased areas of local decision making and the power to make those decisions, should increase community and staff satisfaction.

> Specific training in establishing goals, and most importantly, how to evaluate goals. For example, in this year's Village Improvement Plan for New Stuyahok, villagers suggested ways to evaluate their goal of increasing language competence in English and Yup'ik, and cultural competence in Yup'ik. Although a plan has been established and steps have been made, specific training in how to assess educational goals by members of both school and community would strengthen the relationship between school and community and should lead directly to increasingly meeting the goals.

Curriculum and Local Culture

From teachers in training from southwest Alaska in the early 1960s, to Carol Seyfrit's 1996 study to the districts' sponsored CSMimpact study (1998), there has been substantial interest on the part of local community residents and students in including local culture and language in schooling. One of the two goals established by New Stuyahok for action during the AOTE process concerned bicultural and bilingual competence, and the school and the community continue to work toward accomplishing this goal. In fact, as part of the 1998 School Improvement Study, residents of New Stuyahok made numerous concrete suggestions on how to meet and evaluate the goals and evaluate the degree to which these goals have been met. At the present time, no independent observable evidence can be brought to bear on the degree to which the New Stuyahok school and community have moved toward this goal.

From data collected during interviews with the leadership team (those members also associated with this case study), it is clear that efforts have been made to address a bicultural school agenda. These efforts have been linked to a number of individuals associated with the AOTE, the community and the school. There is clear evidence to suggest that the elders and community members sharing their knowledge and skills at the school are becoming a part of schooling. The advent of this effort arises from multiple sources, such as the efforts of a teaching couple who connected Yup'ik dancing and community involvement; AOTE process and having community members highlight this area as a need and establish it as a goal; individuals such as Margie Hastings, who bridge

school and community and make processes such as AOTE work; and elders willing to share their knowledge. To continue these efforts and strengthen them, the following suggestions are being made.

At the present time, through interviews and discussions with team members, it appears that bicultural or Yup'ik knowledge, such as beading, survival trips, story telling, and others are seen as separate from the academic program. This separation appears to restrict the potential for mainstreaming Yup'ik cultural knowledge and treating that knowledge as potentially a powerful source of academic knowledge.

View Yup'ik cultural knowledge as a system of knowledge instead of as discrete tasks (beading or survival skills for example). This should help in organizing a Yup'ik cultural program as a part of the academic program in the same way that one may organize other content areas.

Planning by the community and the school to systemize Yup'ik cultural knowledge into the academic curriculum, would be one step toward integrating Yup'ik and Western knowledge. To accomplish this, elders and teachers can work together to understand more fully the contributions that Yup'ik knowledge can make to the curriculum. Organizing this knowledge developmentally would also contribute to making it more accessible to schooling.

It is recommended that the leadership team work with the expanded CSC begin to plan for this change. Further, it is necessary that workshops and/or other means of support be built into this process, so that both school and community can realize the potential of this shift. More concretely, working with elders to (a) Establish bodies of knowledge that the community wants to transmit through schooling; (b) who would teach it and under what circumstances; (c) what should be taught to what age group; (d) how it should be evaluated in a cultural manner; and (e) how and in what ways it connects to academic knowledge.

This long-term recommendation will have the added advantage of stabilizing the system in a situation that continues moderate to rapid turnover of teachers and principals.

Leadership team members (both community members and teachers) should be long-term members of the school and community and provide leadership and continuity in the same way that the district has institutionalized its CRT program. However, making such a change will require bold steps on the part of the school district to shift power from individuals to local leadership teams that represent career teachers, staff, community members, students, and the principal.

Clearly, schools and communities in rural Alaska can work together for improved schools and the betterment of the children. However, this is more easily said than done. From this case study, it is apparent that processes such as AOTE, where a dialogue between school and community becomes a part of the district's policy and practice, is one large step in this direction. Certain historical and structural problems continue to cause perennial challenges. Being far from mainstream America means that teacher turnover is a fact of life in rural Alaska and Native education. Turnover relates directly to the culture of the school and its relationship to the community. Teachers are too often unfamiliar with the communities in which they work and reside, schooling in a sense is always starting over, communities are always socializing the new staff, and too often teachers are forced to teach outside of their area of expertise. Efforts by SWRS to stabilize the culture of the school by developing policies and practices that build on local knowledge through processes such as AOTE are surely one way to improve schooling, build trust, and stabilize the curriculum in rural Alaska. The following suggestions further support these trends:

- Policies that expand the role and the size of CSC (local boards) to improve communication, planning, and the relationship between school and community.
- Support the district's long-term goals by providing an economic investment in career teachers, local teachers, and community members.
- Have teachers teach within their subject matter expertise.
- Evaluate student progress through CRT's and community-based evaluation instruments.

Policies alone cannot ensure stability and progress toward identifying goals and implementing the steps necessary to achieve them. Developing strategies for a continuing dialogue between school and community is critical, since rural Alaska is probably one of

the fastest changing places in America. The only way to keep abreast of these changes and maintain the growing trust between the community and the school district is to continue to involve the school and community in a dialogue, particularly when that dialogue is connected to local decision making. SWRS has made some strong inroads in this direction. These steps need to continue to be developed and strengthened by building that capacity from within the school-community context. Local and regional board members, long-staying teachers, and involved community members must be supported, since they continue to play a vital role in adapting schooling to the community and the community to the school.

Lessons Learned and Policy Recommendations

Creating sustainable change requires bold and broad steps. The perennial issue of rapid teacher turnover is a direct obstacle to reform efforts underway in many rural Alaskan communities. In general, teacher turnover creates a chaotic culture of schooling where new teachers must adapt and become acquainted with the village, the students, and the curriculum. Simultaneously, the community must re-educate yet another cadre of teachers. This means that many teachers do not become sufficiently familiar with the school and school district's philosophy and curriculum, nor sufficiently acquainted with the community to effectively bridge local knowledge and school knowledge. In addition to working more closely with long-term teachers, teacher aides, and community members, more needs to occur to stabilize the culture of schooling so that academic success is not just a short-term goal but is actualized in the long-term. One way out of this dilemma for rural Alaskan schools is for the state to commit considerably more resources to help communities "grow their own" teachers. From the data collected in this study and from previous experience in rural Alaska, local teachers tend to spend their careers in their home community or other rural communities. Having more local teaches who spend many more years in a district is a direct antidote to the cycle of chaos that has permeated too much of the Alaskan educational scene since its colonial inception. Teachers who are developed from within the community stay longer than those who come from outside. They are already knowledgeable about the children and the community, and they bring

these advantages to teaching. Further, investing inservice resources on teachers who will make teaching in rural Alaska their careers raises the possibility of moving from stability to quality. Stability of staff allows for the slow accumulation of wisdom associated with practice, which is foundational to having a quality educational program.

Long-term change requires a number of major shifts in state policy. First, the University of Alaska needs to become much proactive in its educational outreach programs to recruit, train, and graduate local teachers. In fact, the opposite has been happening during this past decade. Second, at the level of the state legislature more money needs to be put into teacher education and a re-thinking of the so-called standards movement that now includes a post-baccalaureate degree to become a teacher and the testing of teachers on a paper and pencil test before licensure is granted. These structural changes will further slow the pace for recruiting, preparing, and graduating local teachers. Despite the standard movement's ideal of having higher academic standards, there is already evidence in Alaska and elsewhere that this will result in teacher shortages. This means that some rural districts will be forced to hire more teachers to teach out of their area of expertise, that some positions will go unfilled, and that teachers leaving rural areas may actually accelerate. If this is true, then the standards movement will contribute inadvertently to fueling the dynamics that lead to a culture of school chaos over stability. Third, preparing and developing local teachers and supporting them through their careers is another way to both stabilize the culture of schooling while bolstering the academic climate. This creates possibilities for academic excellence in the long-term.

Postscript

As of May 1999, at the close of the spring school semester, teacher turnover rates continue at moderate to high levels. Four teachers and the current school principal are leaving New Stuyahok. In four years, there will have been three different principals. This, of course, makes stability and school leadership problematic. Two of the teachers leaving are from the elementary school. In another district school, teacher turnover rates are even more severe: 11 out of 17 teachers are leaving the Togiak school after the 1998–99 school year, representing a 65% turnover rate. A number of long-term career teachers,

both insiders and outsiders, are also affected this year. Two long-term Yup'ik teachers are retiring, each with approximately 20 or more years of service with the district. Two other teaching couples, one with approximately 13 years experience and the other with approximately 20 years of service, are retiring.

This rapid turnover of teachers continues as a perennial problem, fueled now even more by Alaska's state budgetary problems. This has resulted in teacher retirement incentive programs, particularly and adversely affecting long-term teachers. To counter this trend, more effort needs to be made to attract Alaska teachers who appear to have a longer tenure in Alaska's schools. Noncertified staff continue to provide stability, since they are more likely to stay with their jobs for many years.

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Appendix A

Interview with Janelle Cowan

The following interview and interview questions with Janelle Cowan conducted on July 10, 1998, conform to the AOTE case study outline sections #3 and #4.
The interview follows below.

Two major goals of AOTE:
Increased Community Voice and Improved Student Experience/Learning

Question: Do community members have greater influence and decision-making powers in educational matters?

Janelle: Because of AOTE, community members including students have much greater voice in evaluating, discussing, debating, and developing the educational program of the school. It is done much more often since AOTE. After the three years that we were part of OTE, we tried to institutionalize this process through monthly community advisory meetings (CSC). We created a template called the village school improvement plan. This helps them with a common document where they are able to evaluate the progress on the outcomes that each village chose. This process has increased the amount of time that communities focus upon education.

Question: Who generates the village school improvement plan?

Janelle: The CSC does through its monthly meetings.

Question: How do the district and the community check to see if the goals are being met?

Janelle: There are five components of the document from planning to evaluating. It is up to each individual site. Each site emphasizes outcome evaluation, and they evaluate their progress using the evaluation plan that they designed. They note the success that they have reached. If not reached then the planning/evaluation process suggests that sites take additional steps to meet their objectives.

This process also helps the district in the Ch. 1 Report Card. These are school plans that we use for multiple purposes.

Question: How does the district utilize indigenous culture and weave it into the curriculum?

Janelle: We believe that utilizing the students' prior knowledge is critical in our instructional delivery. We base some of these beliefs on reading comprehension. This has been a major area for the district this year, for example local story telling. At the in-service this year Evelyn Yanez and Annie McCarthy demonstrated a storyboard. Evelyn doing it the Native way and Annie showing how the same story could effectively meet literacy objectives more closely associated with schooling and the Western culture. They showed this story could be taught in different ways. Some of our competencies, how one

story can meet the need of both the indigenous culture and the school district. So, this same story can be used in a variety of ways.

As a follow-up to this, we did a Socratic discussion. We feel this is a powerful tool to use this with the students. We discussed the differences in delivery of the Native ways vs. the Western. Another big component of why we did this demonstration was to show how our assessments could be done in the context of the lesson itself. We are trying to convince our teachers that assessment is done during instruction.

In our assessment booklet we have incorporated much of the Yup'ik information and activities that we can. Storytelling, storyboard, etc., getting our teachers to focus on these as viable tools to use.

Question: How has the use of indigenous knowledge affected schooling?

Janelle: We are doing a better job of connecting the Native knowledge into the regular classroom. Much better emphasis with teacher aides teaming and working with the classroom teacher. When we have Native certificate aides and teacher working side by side we are getting phenomenal connection there. For example, in New Stuyahok Ann Edwards has two aides working in her classroom and they are doing great deal of activity that focus on Native knowledge. In fact, we got a newsletter of highlights that occurred during the year. Ann Edward's listed Yup'ik word songs, older students came into the classroom etc. They are doing a good job of using the local culture in the classroom. Evidence is seen in the other teachers, of course, some more than others. Field trips, *akutaq* parties, Nick Wyagon telling stories, John Hanson bringing his lead sled dog into school represent some of the connections between the local culture and schooling. I think there is more of an effort to get local resources into schooling. I attribute that to Evelyn's efforts to have teachers become comfortable with elders in the classroom and to use local knowledge in the classroom.

Question: Are community members visible in the school?

Janelle: Focus of bringing resource people in having classroom aides, from the local community, many of them having knowledge of language and culture, parent volunteers, a greater emphasis over the last few years. All the sites are trying to get parents in more often. CSC meetings also being an AOTE meeting there has been more and greater attendance at CSC meetings beyond the members. Administrators are advertising and seeking greater community involvement.

From my first years with the district to my last years with the district there is a much greater cooperative effort between the school and the community for the common good of the children. I think also just having teachers go into the community for parent-teacher conferences has helped. This has been more common over the past few years. Parents are more accepting of having visitors into their homes. During the school year they may have parent conferences at school or at home. This has occurred more often during the past five years.

Question: How are the school and community sharing responsibility?

Janelle: Specifically, in New Stuyahok there is a focus on language and culture (Yup'ik and English). This lead to the formation of a dance group. That is coordinated by both school and community. It is a shared responsibility. When they perform, where they perform, etc. I see greater voice coming from the community. The dance group was formed.

A survival trip occurs each year and there is great community ownership in that. The community, may, in fact, set it up.

Shared responsibility for students' success. Involving parents in students' homework. For example, reading to students or students reading to their parents. The school has put an emphasis on cultural activities during the day.

Question: Is there improved student experiences and learning?

Janelle: Emphasis on language and cultural activities during the school day. These occur both in the classroom and out in the community. They do storytelling, beading, and dance. Because of the focus of students demonstrating responsibility, self-esteem the school itself is well cared for. There is no evidence of vandalism. Students take pride in their school.

As far as assessment data, one thing that we have done with our competency program. We have created a Yup'ik version of the competence evaluation for the Yup'ik first language program. This has been a major change over the last two or three years.

Greater mastery on our CRT's is occurring. I think that some of that success can be assigned to parents taking a greater interest in the school and becoming partners in the process. We have created bar graphs for each of the sites. We have cumulative data since 1993. We have the information. They have data for K–3. Each year a new grade is added to the CRT process. We use this data as a means of not only evaluating but to determine programmatic interventions to improve learning. We did this before AOTE but since parents have a greater voice since AOTE it further helps their children because of AOTE.

Janelle: Competency program, which includes student portfolios, assists students to connect their learning and their academic success with classroom activities. Specifically, when they are assessed they get results back individually and they have a "history sheet" that shows skills that they have mastered and how many times that they have tried to master them. They know what skill is important. They have a sense of goal and where they are headed. Portfolio is the tool we use for students to collect and document their own growth. For example, putting writing samples from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Being able to attend the AOTE meetings. The students in New Stuyahok take a big role in leading some of the smaller discussion groups. The leader of the group may well be a student.

Appendix B

Reflections on Alaska Onward to Excellence

Since I came to Southwest Region Schools in 1978, I have witnessed many changes. This has always been a progressive district, which is one reason I have spent my career with this district from which I'm retiring this year. I credit the School Board with providing stable, responsible leadership for the district. Our board members take their positions seriously and their actions reflect their commitment to the question on the backside of their nameplates on the boardroom table, "Is it in the best interest of the kids?" With their guidance, Southwest Region has grown into a first-class operation.

I have worked under the direction of five superintendents. The board has chosen superintendents who were able to move the district forward and who were cognizant of the mission already established. For the most part, a new superintendent did not mean we threw everything out and started over. Instead, our superintendents supported activities that were working and helped to change those that weren't or added new activities to make the organization better. This stability has been positive and has allowed us to refine many of our programs.

When the opportunity arose to be part of an AOTE grant, both the board and the superintendent saw its potential. We had attempted a few other strategic processes with varying degrees of success, but in my opinion, the AOTE process has been a model that has worked for the district. The focus on community members leading the process was a key element for our success. The focus on improving student achievement was tangible and was an issue with which both the school staff and community could relate. The process enabled school personnel, parents, students, and community members to dialogue about problems and seek solutions. There is a tremendous sense of ownership in the value statements, mission, and outcomes, which continue to guide our programs. When the superintendent who started the process left, the board chose a new superintendent who would continue the AOTE process. Even with staff turnover at the site, we have a common vocabulary and process that guides the new staff and make their transition easier.

I believe in the AOTE process and I can retire confident in the knowledge that, because of the process, many of the programs that I have implemented and supervised will remain viable and effective due to the scrutiny and evaluation which they will undergo with AOTE.

Janelle Cowan, director of elementary instruction, July 11, 1998

Appendix C

Interview with Don Evans

Don Evans, Superintendent of Schools
SWRS
July 15, 1998

The interview follows below.
Two major goals of AOTE:
Increased community voice and improved student experience/learning

Question: Do community members have greater influence and decision-making powers in educational matters?

There is an increase in decision making, and it increases each year. We get better in implementing the process and the community gets more accustomed to it. The community evaluates their programs in January, and in April they write a plan to see how they would want it implemented and changed. We are looking for even more involvement and influence and it is coming gradually and it will come further as we each get better at the process.

We have a CSC and during this process from January to April and we expand the membership of this committee. We pull in additional members, staff, parents, and students and other community members. These meetings are public. The actual membership is expanded during these four months. This is written into the board policy. This comes from the AOTE process of having a broad-based community involvement. [Past spring's evaluation document and planning documents and forward]

Question: Who generates the village school improvement plan?

The village leadership team, which is the expanded CSC as mentioned above.

Question: How do the district and the community checks to see if the goals are being met?

Done during the evaluation phase during the spring.

Question: How does the district utilize indigenous culture and weave it into the curriculum?

We have also made gains here but it is not yet to the level we want. The district does it because the community wants it then we call upon the site administrator and the site staff to facilitate that process. Then we ask the community to see if we have met what they have in mind. We strive for the extent that the community wants. Supporting the effort

with training, staff training is a limit and your grant helps that process and the grant with AFN; all of those things support that effort.

Question: What is the role of the indigenous teacher?

The Native teachers who implement that curriculum are bound to help that curriculum. We want to increase Native staff. What we want to really do is to maintain. We lost the Pettigrews. As fast as we hire Native teachers we lose them. We are over 20% now. In a couple of years we have several people that will be out of college. I think that the district is focusing on Native hire and we are seeing how the increases will come faster. More kids are entering college and more are ready to come out of college. Now after what we have done during the past five years we will reap the benefits. Less than 20% of our kids even attempted college eight years ago and now over 50% are attempting college, and obviously need an attempt before success. In 1994 we had only 1 person make it through college, now we have several people through the 3rd and 4th year; 7 freshmen out of 14 graduates.

Question: What is generating this change?

I think it is that we have begun the AOTE process and made community members have some ownership in the program. We listen to what their goals are for their kids. The AOTE process made the community members realize that they had these goals and the situation of school and their program was not meeting these goals. They had to change both the school and the community to change the goals that the AOTE process has identified. We do want these things for our kids and we have to change these things for the kids and for the school parts we had to refocus to meet these goals. We are trying to get our kids educated so that they can educate their own kids. The missions and the goals came into focus and we made changes to accommodate those. For example, the changes in our Hs program. The community made changes such as having higher expectations for academics, improved attendance, and expectations of success instead of an expectation of failure. The AOTE process caused an awakening and created a dialogue. The connection between good attendance and higher academic standards were not clear in each person's mind. Less than 50% of the parents graduated Hs. You are expecting folks to understand what they did not experience. How would they know what is important. The dialogue that took place gave them an understanding of why we expect higher academic standards, better attendance. AOTE. They saw the connection between the dialogue and the goals. The family needs to support the child in college. Part of the dialogue that we had focused on how they need to support them. Why do we assume that they know to support that child because they have not had that experience? We built those skills and knowledge now. That is part of the support in college. Not only the community but also the teacher. There had to be higher expectations. People were accepting the status quo and the failure; now, we are not going to accept that anymore.
You can have great CAT scores but not be successful in your goals.

Question: Are community members visible in the school?

AOTE has made them more visible in the school through the planning and the evaluating process. It has allowed the school and the community to have more parent volunteers. Once they have established their goals and see that some of this requires their expertise in the school then it increases this in the school. The extent varies by school and village. Increased parent and community involvement is one of the board's goals. Several schools have set very aggressive goals for 100% of their parents involved in some activity during the year. Increase parent participation. This is a systemic goal. We had a teacher who said they didn't want parents in their classroom. It is not epidemic yet, just systemic.

Question: How has the use of indigenous knowledge affected schooling?

I think it has affected by increasing a sense of ownership in the community. Improved self-concept of students; they have worth and value to bring to the school and the society. A body of knowledge that only their people have. When that is in the subconscious of a child then they are more receptive to learn other things. When you hold yourself equal then you are much more open to learning.

Question: How are the school and community sharing responsibility?

I think that we kind of put the burden on the school and the community. This is your goal, your plan, and we will make sure that you have the resources. You have to do this, giving them ownership and the feeling that the school is theirs. Also, comes responsibility for the success of the plan and not the district's.

Because of this attitude and change we revised the whole budgeting process for the district. It gives the site more discretion to achieve their goals. This started about four years ago. It has been a learning process as we went along. It took a long time for them to be in it. What we do is allocate funds through a formula. Each site took part in developing the formula. Sites get an equitable share of the pie. With few exceptions, because of legal mandates. This is how we allocate. You may spend it differently if you want to spend your money differently. We will make the changes that you need to make. So, we issue a budget then they have the discretion of changing it. If a school wants 5 aides and 13 teachers instead of different mix we will accommodate it. We cannot hold a community and a school responsible if they don't have the authority and the discretion to meet their goals to have some control over their goals. To be truly accountable to meet their goals.

We went back to the necessity of site-based management and personal experience. Most people who have site-based management do not want site-based responsibility. I always felt that you have to have responsibility or vice versa you have to have the ability to control the environment or you can't be really responsible for it. Site-based management is a legitimate way to organize it but not one wants to assume the responsibility. I said it has to go hand in hand. The goals of the AOTE process then you have to give them responsibility empower them. All of this is within the parameters of the state regulations and district policy. Within those parameters they are free to make those decisions. The

term we use is site-based decision making. Sites tell us how decisions should be made and we assist with the accounting, budgeting, etc. We make our decisions from a site base.

I think it is significant. You can evaluate and plan for your school through your AOTE process. If you are trying to make major changes then this is one of the key factors to allow changes to take place. Site-based decision making and the responsibility and the authority to allocate their site resources as they see needed.

Question: Is there improved student experiences and learning?

Our early indications are that yes they have. This comes through our criterion referenced testing. Major here. Postsecondary endeavors of our graduates. ACT test scores have improved. 1991–97 school year ACT district performance and the state performance on the same graph. This will show how next year's graph. This year's juniors outscored this year's senior on the ACT. The 91 scores for this district were 13.3 this year they were 15.3. The juniors scored almost 17th; it should take an upturn. The next class is the first kids who have been in the high school model since we have changed the Hs. They are definitely scoring higher than the kids who have not been in the program are. We are not nearly at the state and national average but we are closing the gap.

We are seeing indicators; nothing changes overnight. Can't say that it is the final answer.

CSMimpact Study Highlights

Elementary School Students	
Atmosphere	8.3%
Priorities for Change	
Improve school facilities	52%
Re-evaluate quality and quantity of food served	20%
Uninteresting homework/lack of clear understanding of	28%
More opportunities for extra help	17%
Encourage students to participate in class	6%
Miscellaneous	
Quality of family involvement was good or excellent	67%
Quantity of family involvement was good or excellent	52%
Enough opportunity for family involvement	68%
Local culture included what they learned	76%
Secondary School Students Priorities for Change	
Improve respect of math teacher to students	10%
Had a serious problem with their social studies teacher	12%
Students should help each other more	9%
Improve school libraries—increase holdings	51%
Principal should support student activities	27%
Counselors do a better job helping students prepare for ACT/SAT	23%
Rate their program good or excellent	63%
Quality of family involvement was good or excellent	54%
Quantity of family involvement was good or excellent	46%
Enough opportunities for family involvement	62%
Local culture was always or usually included	44%
Teachers and Staff—Priorities for Change	
Improve audio-visual equipment- 38% of teachers rated this not adequate	38%
More respect from building administrator	8%
Increase academic expectations for students	29%
Improve copiers and printers	46%
Improve communication with School Board-ask for the opinion/suggestions of staff/teachers	46%
Improve communication with Superintendent-ask for the opinion/suggestions of staff/teachers	49%
Increase employee involvement in establishing and defining policies	39%

Students should support each other more	45%
Employees involved in planning professional development	63%
Quality of professional development activity was good or excellent	60%
District supported building professional needs	68%

Parents-Priorities for Change

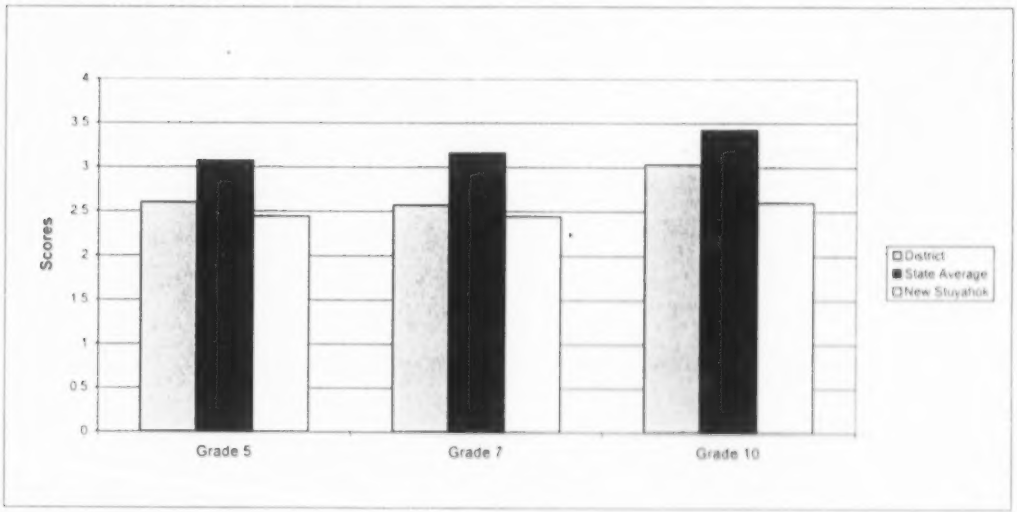
District should improve communication about the budget	46%
Their students should receive more individual attention	14%
Science lab did not meet student needs	47%
More parental involvement with the School Board	37%
More parental involvement with Superintendent and Admin	34%
Inform parents about school activities	23%
Attendance at CSC was good or excellent	31%
Local culture was always or usually reflected in instructional program	54%
School program was excellent or good	55%
Familiar with elementary language arts and math comp.	50%
Family involvement in their child's school good or excellent	56%
Quantity of family involvement as good or excellent	56%
Enough opportunities for family involvement at their child's school	74%

Appendix E

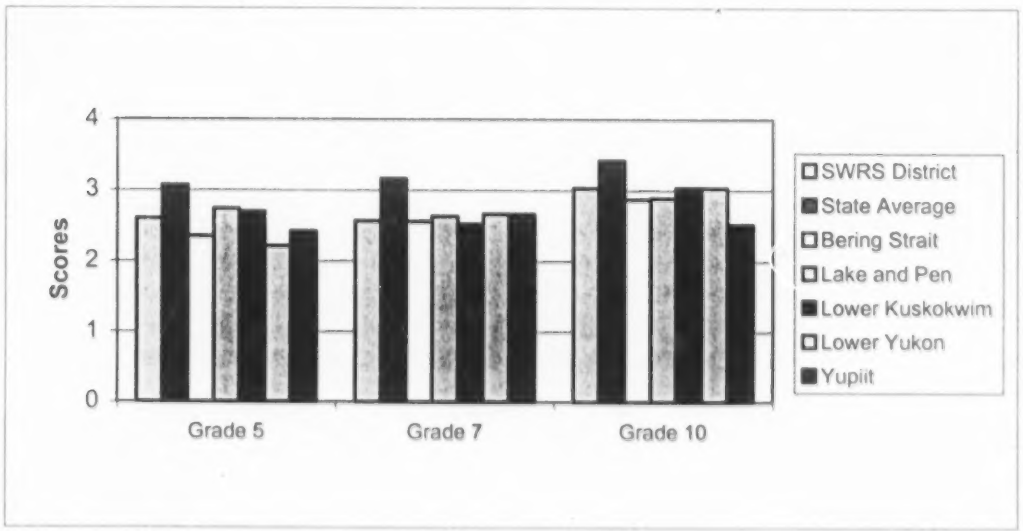
Writing Assessment Scores

Comparison of 1998 Alaska Writing Assessment Scores for Selected Bush School Districts and Statewide Averages.

1998 Alaska Writing Sample: State, District, and New Stuyahok Averages



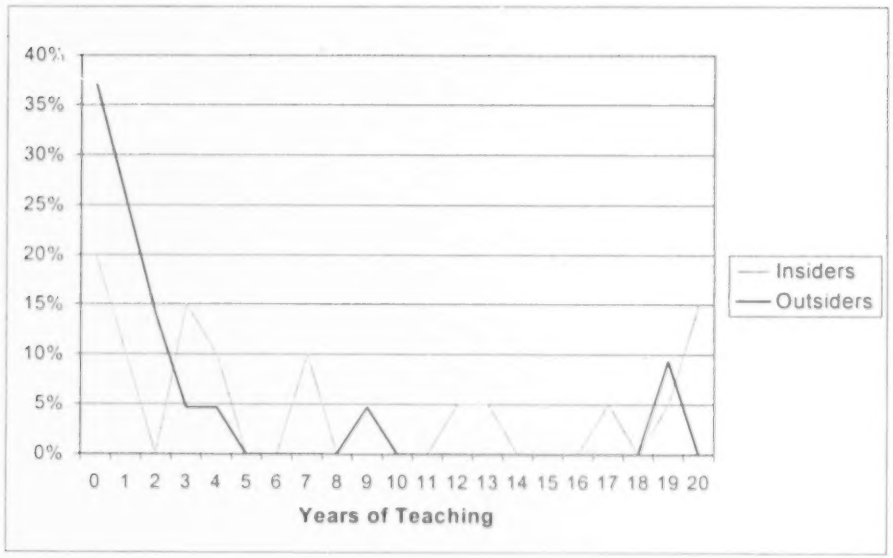
1998 Alaska Writing Assessment Selected School Districts and Statewide Averages



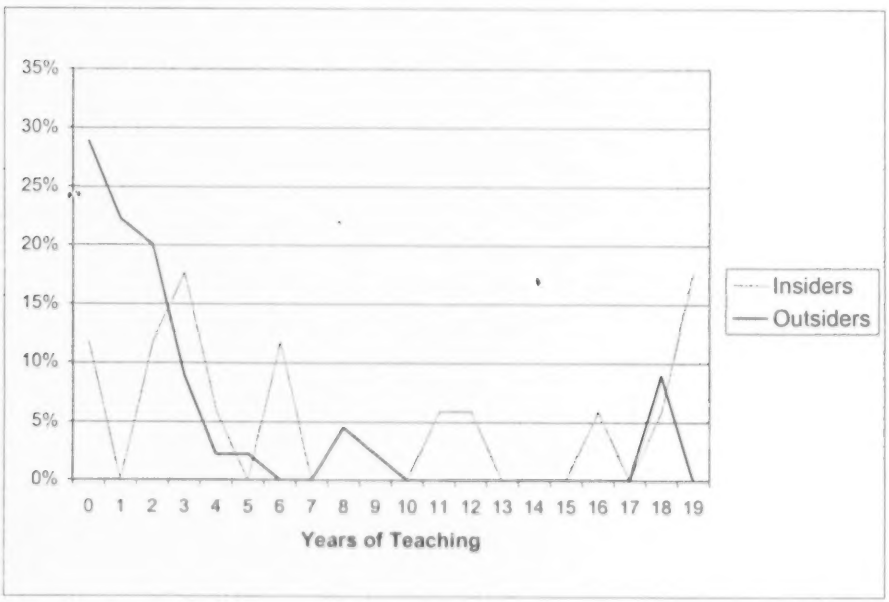
Appendix F

Data on Teacher Turnover Rates 1993–1999

Comparing the Percentage of Inside and Outside Teachers by the Number of Years in the District 1998-99



Comparing the Percentage of Inside and Outside Teachers by the Number of Years in the District 1997-98



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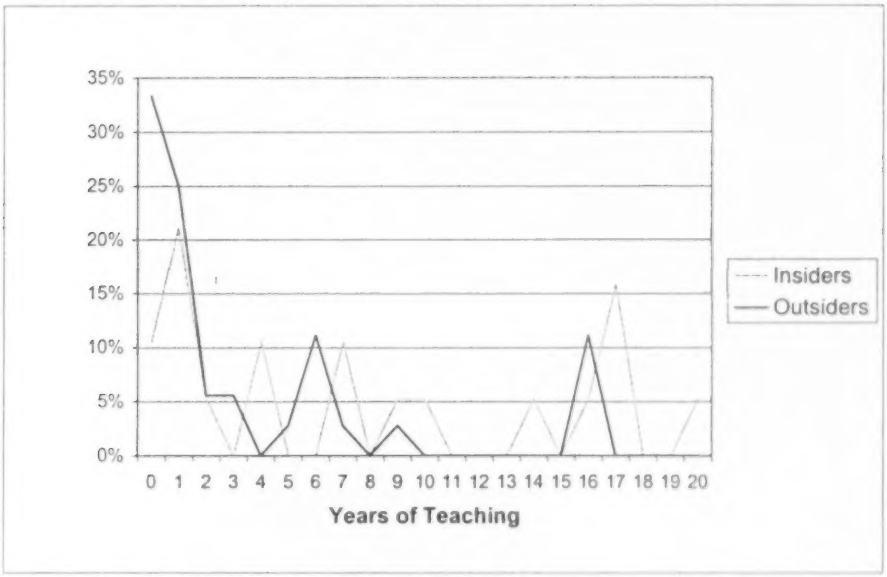
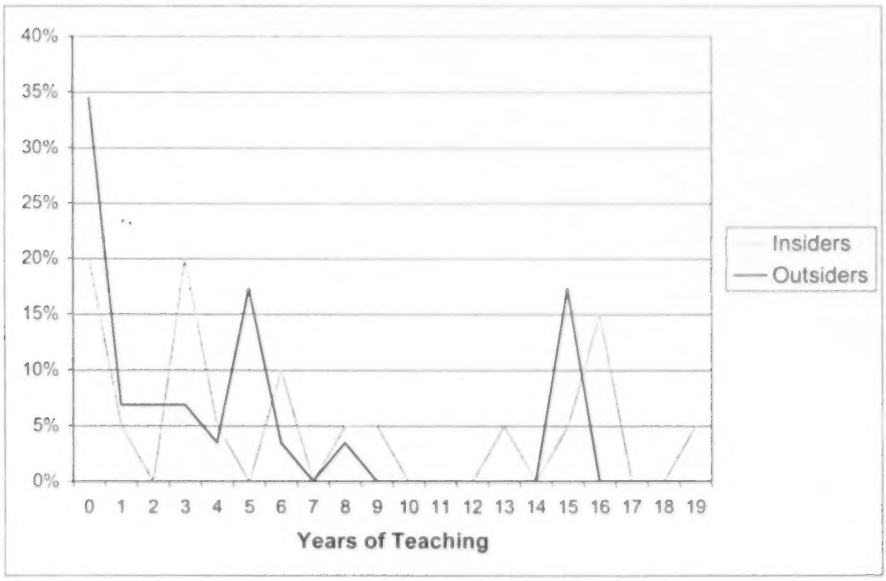
Comparing the Percentage of Inside and Outside Teachers by the Number of Years in the District, 1995–96



Comparing the Percentage of Inside and Outside Teachers by the Number of Years in the District 1994–95



Comparing the Percentage of Inside and Outside Teachers by the Number of Years in the District 1993–94